947 M19n 56-05208
Magidoff $3.50
Vila, her story as told to
Willie Snow Ethridge.

kansas city public library
kansas city, missouri

Books will be issued only
on presentation of library card.
Please report lost cards and
change of residence promptly.
Card holders are responsible for
all books, records, films, pictures
or other library materials
checked out on their cards.

DATE DUE

OCT 29

SOUTHWEST

NOV 8 '59

BOOKS BY WILLIE SNOW ETHRIDGE

As I Live and Breathe

Mingled Yarn

I'll Sing One Song

This Little Pig Stayed at Home

It's Greek to Me

Going to Jerusalem

Let's Talk Turkey

Nila

HER STORY AS TOLD TO

Willie Snow Ethridge

SIMON AND SCHUSTER : NEW YORK : 1956

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
INCLUDING THE RIGHT OF REPRODUCTION
IN WHOLE OR IN PART IN ANY FORM
© 1956 BY NILA MAGIDOFF AND WILLIE SNOW ETHRIDGE
PUBLISHED BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER, INC.
ROCKEFELLER CENTER, 630 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 20, N. Y.
SECOND PRINTING

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER: 56-6668
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AMERICAN BOOK–STRATFORD PRESS, INC., NEW YORK

To Mark and Robert,

the collaborators of the collaborators

Contents

INTRODUCTION ix

1. My First Smell of Freedom 1
2. The Roughness of the Life 13
3. An Absolute Hero! 29
4. Adventure in Kirghizia 33
5. A Sailor in the Russian Merchant Marines 45
6. Everything Got More Screwed—You Know, Tight 51
7. The Most Horrifying Prison 63
8. With the Criminals Is the Place 80
9. Siberia—But Did I Enjoy It! 91
10. This Was the End for Karel and Me 103
11. How to Be a Terrific Reporter in Moscow 114
12. The Balance of the Life 121

13. The Saddest Romance One Can Imagine 126
14. How I Learn English 142
15. Here I Am Brought to the Hollywood Bowl 149
16. I Learned about America the Hard Way 162
17. In Russia They Wouldn't Believe It 174
18. My Friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt 185
19. Only the Woman Survive 194
20. My Mother Was a Remarkable Woman 202
21. Forty-eight Hours to Leave Moscow 208
22. The Pressure of Life in Louisville 219
23. I Find My Place 231

Introduction

My acquaintance with Nila Magidoff began during World War II when thousands of us at-home Americans were working long, exhausting hours to relieve the distress of the hard-pressed Russian people, who were our allies. As Kentucky chairman of Russian War Relief, I wrote to national headquarters in New York for a speaker to come to Louisville to spark an intensive drive for old clothes. Nila was sent.

I was at the station in plenty of time to welcome her, but I was so surprised at the sight of her that I forgot for several minutes to move forward. I never saw a more impressive figure. Wearing a short mink jacket, and a mink hat towering like a joint of stovepipe on her head, she strode through the railroad gates. Her big-boned peasant body was arrogantly erect; her cheeks were flat and broad beneath fairly high cheekbones; her skin, without make-up of any kind—not even lipstick—was a smooth, healthy brown; and her hair, dark and straight, was pulled severely back to a small bun on the nape of her long neck.

Somewhat nervous, I drove her the fourteen miles to our

house in the village of Prospect, showed her to the guest room, turned down the bed, drew the shades and retreated.

Daily, the National Russian War Relief had been notifying me that "Madam" Magidoff must be quiet. She could attend no receptions, luncheons, dinners or other social affairs. She was very tired and must conserve her strength for her many public appearances.

All afternoon I left her strictly to herself, warning my five-year-old son David, again and again, to stay out of the house. At sundown I tiptoed back into her room and explained that my husband Mark and I were going out to dinner, that before we knew she was coming to stay with us we had accepted an invitation from older friends which we didn't feel we could break, but that I would send up her dinner on a tray so her rest would not be interrupted.

To my amazement, she rose up instantly, her green-gray eyes warm and shining, and announced in her heavily accented English, "Vere you go, I vill go." Then she paid Mark and me the greatest compliment of our lives: "I already smell you Estridges are good people."

From that moment on she discarded with us the role of visiting celebrity and showed us her real self—the most amusing, outgoing, generous, vibrant, overwhelming human being I have ever known.

She stayed with us that visit about ten days and went everywhere she was invited. She recited plays and poetry by the hour, swinging up and down our long upstairs hall, her deep, musical voice filling the whole house; she walked for miles, I running and panting behind her; and she made, of course, many speeches.

Since then I've seen her innumerable times and grown to love her like a sister. Unfortunately, though, for many years she did not always show her best side to other people. She could be in-

sufferably rude. At parties when people became serious and wanted to talk about what Nila called "the situation," she became bored and made no effort whatsoever to hide the fact. If someone unconsciously made a remark that displeased her or brought back painful memories, she plunged into a dark Russian mood of sullen silence, which sometimes lasted for hours or even days. Now and then these moods were so black that she appeared actually ill.

Also, she had few of the manners that she has since cultivated. When a dinner to which she was invited was served late, as so often happens in Louisville, she would march up and down the living room, inquiring loudly, "When do we eat? I'm hongry like a teegar."

On the platform, however, she left nothing to be desired. She kept audiences tense, on the edges of their chairs, undecided whether to laugh or cry. After listening to her it was clear why Boston University voted her, the year she spoke there, "The Speaker of the Year" and why the United States Treasury Department wrote her at the close of the war a letter of gratitude for her magnificent contribution to the sale of war bonds.

Even while I was mulling over this introduction, Nila "knocked on the head" the "Green-wich" (Connecticut) Woman's Club. She told me so herself, for there is nothing modest about Nila. She is exactly like a three- or five- or even ten-year-old child gloating over her successes. She blurts them out unrestrainedly, as if she can scarcely believe they really happen to her.

"Last Tuesday morning," she related with high excitement, "Miss Elizabeth Schenk—you know who she is, Willie?—that nice girl who does the work at Lee Keedick's Speaker's Bureau—called me up and asked can I possibly go to speak at Green-wich that afternoon. The speaker who was scheduled has something wrong with his throat. Arthritis, maybe. No, I'm sure that can't

be right. You don't have arthritis of the throat, do you? I really missed everything she said except the speaker was a cook and that I must wear an afternoon dress and hat.

"Well, I didn't have a hat that I felt was suitable, but I have a very good friend, Kick Erlanger. So I rushed there and asked her to lend me a hat, but she hasn't a hat, either. I've learned there are two kinds of people who don't have hats: those who are too poor to afford them and those who are so rich they don't need to wear them.

"However, Kick has a cook who collects hats. Everybody knows she simply adores hats and so everybody gives her theirs just as soon as they've worn them once or twice; so Kick suggested that I borrow one of hers.

"This I consider an absolutely wonderful idea. Instead of speaking as a cook, which I'm not prepared to do, I will wear a cook's hat and make my audience as happy as possible.

"So Kick and I proceed to the kitchen and there is Alvina, sitting majestically, and I tell her my problem. 'Please, Mrs. Magidoff, take your choice,' she says and opens the closet doors in the hall where the hats are sitting on these little sticks just like in the millinery shop. On the top shelf are the gray hats, on the next shelf, the blue ones and so on and so on. I pick out an adorable little one, with tassels all over it, and then I return home and put on my orange-burnt dress and my speaking shoes and speaking stockings and, so, to the Green-wich.

"And here we are. Two ladies are waiting for me in a nice Cadillac and they ask would I like to go to the Country Club for a drink before the speaking. I say I don't mind and so we were talking more or less and I was naïve and said, 'I made this dress I'm wearing myself' and oh, Willie, they were not impressed. If I had said Dior or Balenciaga or Fath had made it, then they would have swooned with the pleasure, but for me to have made it myself . . . .

"Fortunately, one of the ladies was formerly from Louisville

and when I told her I was a friend of Mary Shreve Long that helped to build my reputation back.

"Then we went to the club and I sat behind the scene while the chairman introduced me. I always do this, as you know, for then I come z-zh-ip, z-zh-ip to the stage as a complete surprise to the audience. You've never seen an actress sit on the stage before the play begins, have you? That way, there is no drama.

"Well, I was sitting there preparing in my mind a nice, funny beginning about my inability to speak as a cook, nevertheless I was wearing a cook's hat, when I hear the chairman with the trembling voice say, 'I'm sorry, ladies, but Mr. Alistair Cooke is ill and not able to be with us this afternoon,' and then hurriedly, with the cheerful voice: 'but we are most fortunate to have . . .'

"Her last words were drowned out by this wail, 'Oh-h-h-h-h,' and for the first time I got really worried. To my shame, I didn't know this Alistair Cooke, but I understood from the loud groans he's an important person whom they very much want to hear.

"Somebody got up and left the front row—maybe several people; I could hear the steps going out. They came to hear this Cooke and I have nothing to do with their desires. So immediately, I decided I must forget about my cook's hat; it doesn't work for the situation. I must begin as serious as can be; I must knock them on the head."

That Nila accomplished this is evident from the first paragraph of the story of the meeting that appeared in the Greenwich paper, which she gave me:

Instead of the witty commentaries on America by Alistair Cooke, indisposed by influenza, the Greenwich Woman's Club was offered a charming report of how the United States has taken into its fold a Russian citizen, who had married an NBC correspondent.

I have wanted to put her in a book since our early days of friendship, but not until 1954 did she give her consent and co-operation. Then, every morning for over a month, lying back in one of those canvas-covered, aluminum contour chairs on the sun porch, she relived her life in Russia and in this country, the words flooding out of her until, after three or four hours, she was too exhausted, emotionally and physically, to continue.

As unobtrusively as possible I took notes in longhand, for Nila is very sensitive to her audience and I felt more was to be gained by listening with sympathy than getting down every and *and* the.

I have not tried to reproduce all her mispronunciations of English for I felt her constant use of s's for th's and v's for w's and other peculiarities would be distracting; but I have put down, as she spoke them, her verb tenses, which she changed from the past to the present and vice versa without rhyme or reason, and her use of the singular woman *for* women *and* man *for* men *and her many delightful, original turns of speech.*

Nila's story is amazing. Indeed it is so amazing that when a friend once asked me if she had grandchildren and I answered, "Oh, no, she hasn't even any children," he said, "Well, if anybody could have grandchildren without children, it would be Nila."

So, here's her story.

1

My First Smell of Freedom

EARLY ONE MORNING in October 1941, only a few weeks before Pearl Harbor, I arrived in the United States. All night I had spent on deck; I was too excited, nervous and expectant to sleep. Here I was all alone in a strange country, for Robert had had to remain in Moscow as foreign correspondent for NBC. I glued myself to the rails, my heart beating in my throat. What would happen to me in this new land? Will I be happy here? Will the American people like me and accept me? Will I understand the life and will I become a real part of the life? All these thoughts ran like a mad through my mind.

I remember the morning was clear, yet somehow misty if that can be, and I first saw only dimly the silhouette of San Francisco against the fog-colored sky.

Then a boat came with the immigration officers and an Associated Press correspondent who began his interview with me by asking, "Mrs. Magidoff, how do you like America?"

I simply adored this question, for I understand that he liked his country so much he wanted to hear me say I liked it, too, but I had to answer, "How can I say when I've never been in America?"

Then a very interesting thing happened. The immigration officer said, "Welcome to the United States." It was the first time I ever heard to recognize it, the word, "welcome."

Going through the customs was as simple as can be and when I came out the AP correspondent said he would take me to the hotel.

"You wait here a minute," he said, "and I will bring the car."

And in a few minutes he appeared with a gray kind of car and I, very much surprised, asked him, "Does this car belong to the AP office?"

"No," he answered, "it's mine."

I couldn't believe an ordinary newspaper correspondent could have his own car so I argued as best I could with my little English, "But it must be necessary in your work to go to the AP office and to the station to send the telegrams."

"No," he said. "It's mainly for the pleasure."

When we came to the hotel I went to the clerk behind the desk and gave him all my official documents; but I saw by the movement of his eyes he didn't read anything about me. He just pushed this thing at me to sign my name.

"I can sign any name I want?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered calmly, "but why should you want to sign any name except your own?"

That was my first smell of freedom, for in Russia wherever you go you must have your passport with you and if you spend a night in any place, you must register with the militia. Nobody had told me it could be like this and I had not the imagination to dream it.

Then I came to the upstairs to the bedroom and I was really impressed. Since then I've seen better rooms, but then—my God—my own private bath!

Without unpacking I went on the streets to walk and what impressed me was everything was so light and bright after dreary Moscow and the same woman go up and down. The ad-

vertising had so conquered the imagination of woman that it seemed to me there was only one woman walking up and down. In Russia there were no styles, no fashions. The woman wore anything at all, just something from the old days; but in San Francisco that day every woman looked to my unaccustomed eyes like every other woman. And also what interested me was that it was very famous to have the full lips. The woman did not only paint the lips, but the skin around the lips.

Finally I decided to go shopping and I came to the shoes and the clerk found fifty pairs in my size. Fifty! Can imagine? I bought four pair. Yah-h-h! Then the man insisted that he show me the handbag to match the shoes and I understood if I buy these shoes I must buy the handbag because if you bought in Russia something practical you have to buy something unpractical. How to give you an example? Let's say you buy a pair of shoes; then you must buy the fur hat. So I bought the four handbags and I still have two from this one shopping.

When it was evening the AP correspondent came and took me to his home for dinner, and though I know now it was just an ordinary small place I couldn't believe then it was a private house. I ran like a mad up and down, opening the doors, opening the closets, opening the drawers. All the closets were full of clothes and linen and the kitchen had an electric stove and a fine refrigerator. Oh, I was impressed!

After one day in San Francisco I left for New York and I went in the very best style—in a compartment. I had a long sheet of tickets; why, it took the man who made it out at least ten or fifteen minutes. I thought railroad labor in the United States must be very cheap, if not altogether free, for a grown man to spend so much time on just one ticket.

Somehow I don't remember much about the trip, except dinner in the diner the first evening. I was put at a table with a big, successful businessman who, when he picks up the menu never looks to the right at the prices, but only to the left at the food.

I understand if I order just what he does it will be expensive but it will be the best, so I wait and see what he writes down and then I say to the waiter, "The same, please." You see, I accept very quickly the rich habits.

Everything went fine until I want sugar for my coffee and don't see anything that looks like sugar except something in a shaker and so I pick it up and shake it vigorously and then the businessman say, "How very interesting. I never before saw people drink coffee with the salt."

"Really?" I say, not hesitating a second. "I'm from Russia and we think it very healthy to drink salt in coffee." And I beat on my chest with my fist to show him how healthy I am.

What impressed me first in New York was the tuberculosis beauties—you know, those sad mannequins in mink in Saks Fifth Avenue. They are so exclusive, they don't even associate with one another; there is just one to a window.

At Russeks, they are more democratic. There are usually three to a window and the more expensive the dress they have on, the more unhappy they are. When they have on a $35 dress, they look fairly sad; when they have on a $75 dress, they look quite, quite sad; but when they have on a dress where there is no price, they look completely dying.

One evening shortly after I arrived, I was standing before a Russeks window absolutely bewildered. I couldn't understand why these mannequins looked so unhappy and ill; really they were horribly hollow-cheeked and emaciated. I thought maybe I wasn't sufficiently educated to appreciate the lines.

As I stood there, shaking my head sadly, a policeman came up and said, "Lady, can I be of some help?"

And I ask him, "Do you like woman like this?"

Then very serious he looked in the window, his stick dangling in his hands behind him. For a long time he looked and patiently I waited and then he turned to me and said with such a definition, "No!"

Another thing that shocked me was that everybody in New York moved so slowly. It seemed to me in Moscow they moved much faster. I suppose it was because in Moscow there were so few cars and taxis and people had to run all the time to get where they were going. Especially on Fifth and Park avenues, nobody hurries.

I walked up and down a lot the first days for I was impatient to know the smell of the life, and when there was a terrifically heavy snow I was very happy at what I smelled. The snow was piled so high nobody could clear it off the streets and there were just these little tunnels with the people crawling through them and everybody acted like it was a big party. They are bumping into each other and laughing and laughing. I walked up and down and didn't hear one angry word, and I say to myself if the American people can take this hardship so easy, with such a good nature, then they can take anything.

I was very much pleased, too, at the friendliness of the people. Whenever I met somebody and they invite me to dinner they always tried to make me feel at home by having borsch. The only trouble was I never liked borsch in Russia.

Whenever I want to a restaurant and they notice I am Russian, they play "Ochi Chorniya" over and over. The very first time I went to a night club in New York it was the Café Society Uptown and just as soon as I sit down, the orchestra played "Ochi Chorniya." Then the Golden Gate Quartette, what was singing there, made a Boogie Woogie of "Ochi Chorniya" and then Hazel Scott, who was the biggest attraction as can be, came on and play "Ochi Chorniya."

When she finished, I stood up right in the middle of the night club and yelled, "Please, no more 'Ochi Chorniya.' I don't like!"

It was very rude, as I understand now, but just the same I got the renovation from the people. Everybody was screaming with delight.

Then once I came to a restaurant where there is this chief waiter who comes to the table and takes your order and just to be friendly asks where you from. He asks everybody and no matter where a person says he's from, the waiter says he has a brother there. For example he ask you, "Willie, where you from and you say, "Louisville," and he will say, "A wonderful town, Louisville. I have a brother there."

He ask me and I, of course, say, "Moscow," and he say, "Wonderful town, Moscow. I have a brother there."

Oh, I just love it, but when it occurs to him what he say, he is very much embarrassed.

I spent my first two weeks in New York with Robert's parents, who were alive then. They were both very sweet to me and invited me to continue to stay with them, but they had been born in Russia and though they had come to this country when Robert was a boy, they had never become completely assimilated. They spoke to me in Russian and when they spoke of home, it meant their home town in the Ukraine. So I understood that if I stayed with them I shall never become a real part of America; that I shall never fully adopt it and be as fully adopted as I want; that I would be left out of the mainstream of American life.

An old friend of Robert's, the actress Tamara, helped me find an apartment. Tamara was her first and last name. She sang this "Smoke in Your Eyes." I believe it was in a show called *Roberta*. She was one of the most beautiful woman I ever saw; she had very delicate and exquisite features. She was a Russian, but she had come to the United States, I believe, at the very beginning of the Revolution. She was killed in that airplane accident in which Jane Froman was so seriously injured when they were flying to Europe to perform for the American troops.

We looked at all apartments and finally we came to one on the fifth floor at 441 West 21st Street and I say I will take this one. Tamara couldn't understand it. She say, "It's no address.

From 59 Street up looking to the park, that's the address."

Nevertheless, my mind is already made up, for in a niche on the steps between the fourth and fifth floors is this bust of a man with his hand held out, palm up with the fingers slightly curled, and immediately I see it, I like it very, very much. There is such a kindness, such a strength, such a friendliness in the face. I had no idea who he was; but I felt he was my friend and I would not be so alone with him near my door.

Then Tamara tells me it is Abraham Lincoln and from the time I move into the apartment he came to be my best friend. Every morning I will open the door and touch his hand and say, "Good morning, Mr. Lincoln," and every evening I will touch his hand and say, "Good night, Mr. Lincoln." And on those days that I get a letter from Robert I will sit right there on the steps and read it to him. And when I am lonely, which was very, very often for I was so much by myself, I will say, "Oh, Mr. Lincoln, I am so lonely."

The peak of my loneliness was when I would hear Robert in the mornings on the radio say, "This is Robert Magidoff speaking from Moscow." To sit right there in Twenty-first Street and hear his voice took me and shook me, especially those days he would say, "I've just returned from the front." Finally I made an iron rule not to listen and only know he is in life when some friend will phone and say, "I heard Robert this morning." Then I would tell Mr. Lincoln, "Robert is still O.K."

When I went away on little trips and came back, Mr. Lincoln was the one something I had to come home to.

For two years this went on and then one day when I returned from a trip, there was only the shade of the bust left against the wall of the niche. Oh! what a sick vibration I feel in my knees, in my stomach, in my heart, in my soul. For this bust to be gone is the biggest blow one can imagine.

What has happened I frantically asked my landlord, who himself was the sculptor of the bust—an Italian, Mr. Paolo. He

told me that downstairs on the fourth floor lives woman, a most disagreeable woman, who, on going in and out of her apartment, saw me talking with Mr. Lincoln and she complained to him that she couldn't stand any longer my talking to this statue. And so, can imagine, Mr. Paolo sold Mr. Lincoln!

Now to return to the time when I first took the apartment, Tamara offered to shop with me to furnish it and we went to the Macy and this day gave me the . . . the . . . injection that free me all my life from department stores. I completely fill up that day my desire for shopping.

When we came there Tamara asked for the manager and so we were ushered to his office and I noticed on his desk pictures of his wife and children. This, though, wasn't the first time I had noticed on American man's desk pictures of wife and children. In every office I had been in, whether it was the office of a very large boss or a very small boss, I'd seen pictures like this and I understood he does not have this only for pure love but because it gives him a substantial standing with the visitors. More than any words this photograph say he has the character of a reliable person and immediately the visitors open their hearts.

Tamara explained to the manager that I want help to furnish a three-room apartment and he gave me a saleslady and I bought everything in one day. I mean everything from mops to curtains. Really, I'm going through the Macy like a hurricane. Tamara and I went there at ten o'clock in the morning and when the store closed we were making the recipes.

We start with the groceries and I buy everything by cartons that come in cartons. I buy cartons of spaghetti, sardines, beans, tomatoes, peas, peaches, pears, everything. Then I buy twenty-five pounds of sugar, twenty-five pounds of flour and God only knows how many pounds of salt and how many dozen eggs. You know how much I spend just for food? One hundred and fifty dollars.

Tamara tried to stop me. She knows Robert is not rich and that I had to make an arrangement with NBC to advance the money to pay for everything. "Nila," she said, "I know it's not any of my business, but why you need all this?"

And I drew myself up and answered sternly, "Please don't interfere."

However, I now realize it was my unconscious desire to have all these things for fear of some day not having them. It was the natural result of all my life never having the chance to buy. I could not believe all this food would always be available, even in America. I really acted just like Mrs. Joseph E. Davies, the wife of the former ambassador to Russia, who came to Moscow with a whole freight carload of food.

But if I went wild in the grocery, I went completely mad in the hardware department. The gadgets! Like all Russians I was crazy about gadgets and I still am. I bought all sizes of saws, all sizes of screw drivers, all sizes of hammers, all sizes of knives—I remember one was a little crooked knife for an unknown purpose—all sizes of other assorted tools, for tools are very hard to buy in Russia.

"Oh, Nila dear," Tamara begged, "why you need 'em?"

"To have the pleasure of making the home," I said.

I bought ten pounds of assorted nails, for nails are also very scarce in Russia, and all kinds of rings to hang curtains. Then I bought all sizes of double boilers and pots and pans and a board on which to make the dough. Of course, I had never baked anything and didn't plan then to bake anything, but I had the strong desire for the kitchen to be absolutely and completely equipped.

I bought a set of gray dinner dishes with big yellow flowers for twelve people. I didn't know but three or four people in New York at this time; nevertheless, I felt I must be able to set the table for twelve. Can imagine twelve of the same dishes for soup, for butter, for the main course, for salad, for dessert?

Next we went to the furniture department and I bought a table, a bed and some chairs. All the chairs were of natural wood and gray. It took me some time to get used to the contrast colors in furniture. I hear such a sound when I see two chairs red and one chair blue. I bought a gold rug, too. Tamara told me it was not practical and how right she was. Very soon it had a design in dirt upon it that resembled the Himalayan mountains, and after I tried to clean it with some stuff I saw advertised it had a map upon it of the whole world. I also bought enough material to make curtains to go all the way across one wall. It was a lot of yards and it was big-checked in gray, gold and red and I remember even now it cost $2.75 a yard. It was very lovely.

But I thought I would go completely crazy making and hanging those curtains. I wanted a long wooden rod on which to slide the rings back and forth, but not one shop that I went to in the first day's walking had such a long one. The second day I went down to Second Avenue and there in a little shop was a man who said, "O.K., lady, I have such a one, but I can't deliver it."

"O.K.," I said. "I will deliver it myself."

After a lot of juggling back and forth, I got it balanced on my shoulder and here I proceed very dignified with rod through the streets.

For this once nobody follow me. In Russia when a presbyterian will walk on the street with something, a pan or a teapot or a load of bread—you understand nothing is wrapped in Russia—everybody will follow him and ask where he got it. Then you will see the whole street behind the presbyterian begin to move quickly where the purchase was made. However, in New York nobody want this curtain rod and I come to the apartment without incident.

I must say, though, I had a hard time when the groceries came from the Macy. The boxes of tomatoes and everything

filled all the closets from floor to ceiling and I had no place whatsoever to hang my clothes. At first the Macy sent just the food and so in the midst of all this plenty—not even in the Garden of Eden did Adam and Eve have such a plenty—I slept on the floor; but at least I had no worry about the honger.

One of the most difficult things for me to understand in America was the people's indifference to food. When I came in a nice restaurant, I bust myself. I cleaned all my plate absolutely and it worried me terribly that the people I was with didn't clean theirs. When the waitress came I pulled her dress and say, "Look, there is food left. You can save this and eat it later."

When the waiter just filled my cup two-thirds full I asked him to fill it up, please. I even liked to have to drink it from the saucer. I realize now this was completely psychological because all my life in Russia when I had something to drink I just had one cup, never, never a second one; and so I was very careful that it was to the top.

I remember soon after I came to New York some woman invited me to a dinner party, and when they passed the potatoes, the guest in front of me say, "No, thank you." So I lean across the table and say, "Go ahead, take some. They've got plenty." I had already been in the kitchen—any time I went to a house I go up and down from basement to attic—and I knew there was more, but still she say, "No, thank you."

Then one day I was at the fanciest private club and there was a woman there even more thinner than the mannequins. There were just the bones, but quite round bones, not sticking-out bones, and she ate nothing. No bread, no potatoes, no sugar, no cream. And I say to her, "Why you not eat? Aren't you hongry?"

"Of course, I'm hongry," she say. "I'm hongry all the time; but I'm a model and must be thin this way."

With that she fainted away right at my feet. And there I was with all my 160 pounds, but I was perfectly satisfied looking at that woman down.

The worse shock I received, though, was when I got a maid one day to help make the apartment clean and straight. She was a nice, good-looking woman and I thought I like her and I must attract her for I might need her help again, and so when it was 12:30, I put everything good on the table and even went to the Schrafft's and bought a cake and then I say, "Alice, will you come and have your lunch?" But she touched practically nothing. Nothing! She just drank black coffee.

"Don't you like the food?" I ask her, worried as can be.

"I'm on a diet," she answer.

Can imagine? I told her if you will have a cleaning woman in Moscow and you put something on the table, you have to lock up everything else to keep her from eating it.

The American's carelessness about clothes worried me terribly, too. Especially the young girls' carelessness, sitting on the floor in their beautiful dresses. "Oh, you spoil your clothes," I say to them whenever I see them, but they act like they don't hear me.

And the extravagance about the towels! Why sometimes the people use them only once and throw them in a basket to be laundered. I saw Maxim Litvinov's British wife act this way in Moscow once and now I understand she must have copied it from the Americans. I went to a party where she was and she washed her hands in the bathroom, then dried them on a towel and dropped it in the basket. All the Russian woman say behind her back, "Who she think she is, a doctor?"

2

The Roughness of the Life

TO UNDERSTAND why those first weeks in the United States and those that came after struck me on the head it is necessary, Willie, to know about the years I had already spent in life.

I was born in the village of Devinishki in Byelorussia in November 1905. At first everybody thought I would be a no-use child for I was born sick. In fact, I was so sick my father, whose name was Ivan Shevko, and my mother, Maria Ivanovna or Marya for short, decided not to christen me until they were sure I was going to live. It cost from five to ten rubles for a christening, so my father and mother argued why waste so much money if the child is not going to live. It was not stinginess, but the roughness of the life.

For one month they waited and I was not dead, so they decided they must christen me, but they didn't know what name they should call me. However, my mother had a sister Liza who was . . . how you say somebody strange in family? Black pig? . . . Well, she was a strange one. She was always dreaming of going places and she would come in from the fields and read poetry. She chose for me Neonila, which was the name of a

great sinner in an old Russian book. Aunt Liza, dreaming as she ran in the fields, thought this was a fine name.

But in olden days in Russia when you brought the child to be christened, the child must be named one of the names that comes in the Russian Orthodox church calendar which fall on the day of the christening. So the priest, who was in a big fur coat, cap and gloves, refused at first to christen me this Neonila. Something must be done for a proper name, he said; but after a little while he was so terribly cold he decided to christen me no matter what the name and he broke the ice in the basin with my legs and put me under the water three times. I was blue and absolutely naked.

My mother thought this is the end. Before he put me under the water I was giving little weak noises, but afterwards no noises or anything. All day, when they brought me home, there was no sign of the life. Russian peasants aren't afraid to joke about death, so my mother and her friends talk about whether to make a dress for me to be buried in or not. Then they heard a cry and I was never a sick baby any more.

I was the second child. I had an older brother, Nikolai, and two sisters, Alexandra and Zinaida.

One of the most strong memories of my childhood is my father praying. He would stay in a corner and pray and pray, but I never thought him a religious man; he was just making the sign of the cross and murmuring the prayers mechanically. My mother never prayed, but she had a deeply religious soul and we children sensed it because of her saintly goodness.

My father was a very rude man; he was big and had a big, black mustache and his job was cleaning the horses and stables, and he was that kind of husband who, if he provides the food, he is the tsar of the family.

In the evenings when he would come home and sit down to the table to eat, he would never say what he wants. It was beneath his dignity to say he needs a spoon or some salt or

some bread. My mother must always guess what he wants. I never heard the words "thank you" in my family in my entire childhood.

We ate porridge or something from one big bowl in the middle of the table. My mother and father had wooden spoons and my brother and sisters and I, tin spoons. Never as I remember did we have a set of the same dishes.

One day when we were very much hongry, we played a game dreaming what the tsar was eating. Now and then we had a very cheap candy, so my sister said, "He's eating all the candy he wants." But I had a big imagination so I said, "He's eating the top of the milk and putting sugar on it." We also played a game imagining the furniture was made of food. The bed is all made of cake, we would pretend, and all the chairs are made of something nice.

We had real little cakes though, when Mother baked on Saturdays, and sometimes eggs. She understood the childhood was not happy and everything was a struggle for life. When I was five I had to nurse my sister already. My ability as a speaker dates back to those Saturdays for every week I would argue my brother and sisters out of their cakes. I would say to them the cakes were so small that if they ate them they would do them no good, they would just have a bite or two—not enough to really enjoy; but if they gave them all to me then there would be enough to do me good. Mother used to say to the children, "Eat your cakes fast or Nila will talk you out of them."

When I was a very little one I could play for hours just pretending I was arranging buttons. Mother would put me next to the wall and I'd sit there saying, "Put button here, put button there, and it will be very beautiful." I'd sit there perfectly happy just as long as she'd leave me.

The belovedest game, though, as I got a little older, was playing Indians. We children read Fenimore Cooper in Rus-

sian and we were simply crazy about American Indians. When we played I was always Big Mouth, the Chief, and I had a wonderful time sculping everybody; but one time they got me and they went absolutely wild. They tied my hands and feet with the rope and then they gathered millions of burdocks and put in my hair and Mother had to shave me. My head was absolutely bald just like my face.

"I'm going to kill myself," I said and I went to the kitchen and took the big knife.

"Please, Nila, don't die," my brother and sisters begged, getting down on their knees.

"You did it to me," I cried, "and now I'm going to die."

Of course I didn't want to die and I talked and talked, but they got tired I talked so much and so there was nothing left for me to do but to stab myself.

"Nila kilt herself with the butcher knife," they all screamed at the top of their voices and my mother came running and here I am lying dead, but she saw immediately the stab wasn't very deep and so wasn't badly frightened.

Let's describe now how I looked. I was a very ugly child and strangely built. My arms were so long my hands almost came to my knees. I really looked like a gorilla. One day when I was seven years old I heard Mother, who was repairing a stocking with a neighbor woman, say, "When I look at that child I am so worried because nobody will ever marry her."

I want to make it very plain, Mother was not being cruel; it was just the cruelness and simplicity of the life. For my mother marriage meant the survival of life. She never thought to hurt me. She really was worried because it was very important that I be married.

So every night I make the same prayer. "Send me a husband even with one leg," I prayed, for now I was troubled like Mother I'd be left without.

When I was seven and a half I was sent to live with the

grandmother because there were too many mouths to feed. Always when something must be done—if somebody must be sacrificed—it was always me. I ask Mother many years later why and she said, "You can always take anything." The grandmother had a kind of farm and a little—what you call when you make flour?—yes—mill, and water was there running. She was not rich, but she had food enough. The house was divided into two rooms and in one room everybody slept and the other was the kitchen where the chickens and cows, specially in winter, slept. Not the big cow, just the small animals were in this kitchen.

My grandmother was just a peasant woman and had no gentleness of feelings. One day she gave me some pancakes, but I was not in the mood to eat so I refused and then she said, "Eat them for if you were at home you would be starving." It hurt me. I was so hurt in my own pride I was as mad as can be and I went to the back of the house and took some matches and put a fire to the roof which was made of straw. One corner of the house was burned before anybody could put it out and this, you understand, didn't help relations with the grandmother. However, she wasn't a bit more tactful. She was always making this remark that I was not dependable and she beat me, too.

Then I decided to die because I couldn't stand this life. I heard my grandmother talking about a girl working on a farm who took a box of matches and dissolved them in water and killed herself and so I decided that's it. I took some matches and took the ends and dissolved them in water and because the farm girl had left a note to the boy friend I also left a note to the grandmother, saying because of her I was dying. But I didn't die. I just swallowed enough to make me sick and I throwed out. And the grandmother gave me milk, milk, milk and put me to bed. But even after this the grandmother was no more soft. The whole relation was just to feed the child.

I remember I was really unhappy and my mind was occupied constantly with death. My favorite game was playing I was dying and going to heaven or going to hell. I would take a newspaper and cut out a figure and put the figure in the water with a stone on top of it, and then I would lie down in bottom of the boat and try to imagine what a person drowning would feel. I would feel water come into ears, nose; I would see fishes and would force myself to go down into the water until I dozed and watched this dying of myself. I played this so often that once when somebody asked the grandmother, "Where is Nila?" she answered, "I don't know, but I suppose she is drowning in the water."

I really was very unhappy and then it was Easter coming. Even in old Russia people ate so much at Easter they got sick. They always do some kind of cakes with liquor or rum or something. This Easter my grandmother called me into the kitchen and told me to make this dough. I tried and tried and tried and tasted and tasted and got completely drunk. My mother came for the Easter and my face was dull with this liquor and she slapped and slapped me and I ran into the woods and was lost for eighteen hours.

They finally found me at night and this time my grandmother said, "That's enough. No more of this beloved grandchild."

My parents now thought it was time for me to be a bit educated and they sent me to live with an aunt who was a teacher in a village school. The whole school was just two rooms, one in which the aunt lived and the other where the children came. Being the niece of the teacher struck my head and I made the mistake of snobbing the boys and girls. I acted like I was the aristocracy. I made up wild stories how my family lived, how we ate. It was all what I read in the books—I never saw these things I said we was eating.

Naturally, the children weren't very friendly and they made

life miserable for me. It was really the most unhappy time. It was worse than with the grandmother. They called me "Poker" and every day they drew pictures of pokers on the fences. And this time I committed suicide by jumping into a well quite deep, but they got ropes and saved me.

After this the aunt sent me back to Mother—she said I spoiled her relations with the pupils. By now my family had moved to Kursk in Central Russia and so Mother applied to get me into a school for orphans and poor girls that was opening in Kursk under the Fund of Queen Mother, Maria Feodorovna, and I was accepted. They gave me when I came there the ugliest uniform—gray cotton, not silver color—a dirty gray color. They call us the Gray Girls. Gray in Russian not only means a color, but means backward persons—out of society. The uniform was made with a long skirt to the ankles and a round collar like a cape. Everything made on purpose so we don't feel feminine. Hair was cut shortly and we had heavy, uncomfortable boots with buttons. I was really the most unpresentable thing—I was so wild and disorganized. I was always crashing this way and that way.

When I was about eleven I began to realize that all the girls were getting letters from boys and I never got one. So I wrote twenty-seven letters to myself, the most beautiful letters one can imagine, but I made the mistake of writing all of them in the same handwriting. And when I showed them to the girls they made a joke of me and started calling me "Twenty-seven." And again I started to commit suicide. I jumped from a bridge into a stream, but it was very shallow and again I was saved.

I was ten when I first went to this school and was in the third class and I stayed there until I was twelve when the Revolution came. Russia was already three years at war, but I didn't know much about the war and I knew absolutely nothing about the Revolution. My first glimpse of the Revolution was when I saw soldiers marching with little red bows on

their rifles. I asked the supervisor why the red bows, but she didn't want to explain about the Revolution so she said just a bunch of drunkards decided to put bows on their rifles.

But the oldest boy came from the oldest class—he was sixteen and had a red bow—to our class and instead of calling us as always "Children," he called us "Comrades."

"Comrades," he said, "we have to start a new life. The Revolution has come and we all are free. We are no more slaves; we are free people and we will organize a revolutionary committee which will decide which teachers and studies we don't want."

We went wild with joy. Free from the algebra and the physics! Free from everything we don't like!

The revolutionary committee drew up rules that every student can choose what class he wants and I chose the last one. I, only twelve, jumped over everything. And then every student choose the studies he wants. I took up literature, history and French. Can imagine? But soon the Orphan House closed down because it was a tsarist institution and I went back to my family.

Then start the war between the White Army and the Red Army. Kursk was in the very middle of the Revolution and it changed hands seven times. You waked up in the morning and didn't know what the government was. You didn't know whether to wear a red button or put a cross around your neck.

During the Revolution, life was very hard and my mother was a real enterprise. Really she was. My mother would make potato pancakes; she would boil potatoes with the skins and then make balls and fry them in oil made from the sunflower seeds, and then she would put them in a dish and put the dish in a pillow to keep the cakes warm and when the trains arrived she and I would go to the station and sneak around and holler, "Hot pancakes! Hot pancakes!" We had to sneak about for it was against the rules for us to sell this way—this was the Red

period which was against the private enterprise. Mother and I fed the whole family with the money we made, but I was ashamed of the work. The militia men pushed us and all sorts of people insulted us. I remember once a sailor said, "They are made of dung! What do you fry them in—water?"

"I wish I could see you with your behind in a hot pan," I said and added a very bad Russian word.

Finally this enterprise became absolutely impossible. The militia began to arrest us, but instead of putting us in jail they fined us, which was the most hurtful thing.

Then the White Army came and took the town and Mother decided to go back into private enterprise. We found a house that was half ruined and we got permission to open a café. We washed and cleaned and then we found a few tables and chairs from a barn and covered them with white paper—I don't know where we got this white paper—and then we prepared our food. We planned to offer potato cakes, just like the potato cakes we'd sold before and some little cakes, covered with honey and sugar, and tea, except we had nothing to make the tea. So we went to the fields and gathered grass, *Bogoroditzina travka,* which in English means God's Mother—it has little red flowers and is quite smelly—and made our own tea.

This was a very exciting enterprise for me, not because we would have money, but because I would be connected with the outside world. My life was so poor, so cruel, so rude, and now to be in a public place and speak to people!

I remember the first customers. A man, a woman and a little child and they sat at a table and I came to the table and ask, "What you like?"

"Three teas and six potato cakes," the man said and then he counted his money and said, "and one honey cake."

And then I came to Mother who stood behind the counter—she was the woman with the biggest imagination and she and I were pretending like in a tea-ater or a play—and I say with

the stone face, "Three teas please." And she act like we don't know each other.

God! how hard we work at this place! We open it about ten o'clock and immediately people come. By one o'clock all the pancakes are sold, but only three honey cakes because they are quite expensive. So Mother went home to make more potato cakes and I took one of the honey cakes and licked the bottom of it. The licking I saw was unnoticeable, so then I licked them all and put them back and arranged everything nicely.

The next day I thought I could lick them from the other side, but this time a man came and made a row; he said the cakes were already licked and when mother looked at them, she realized it was the truth so she gave them to my sister and brother to eat.

But the potato cakes continued to sell beautifully. Mother make and I sell. Then after ten days we run out of seed oil and we had no money to buy more or pay the taxes, so the café had to close.

For a while Mother was very suffering with nothing to feed the children. Then the peasants began to kill their horses for meat and Mother and I started to sell cutlets, something like hamburgers, you know. At this time money went to nothing and the people didn't sell anything for nothing—they exchange everything. Mother first exchange her wedding ring for horse meat and then there came the day when there was absolutely nothing left and then went the silk pongee. This pongee Father had brought back when he returned from the Japanese-Russian War. It was a light pink pongee silk and mother had saved it for my wedding dress. We both loved to take it out and look at it, but it had to go.

A man in the market gave us ten pounds of horse meat for it and then Mother grind it down with lots of onions and salt and pepper and make the cutlets. Oh, how I remember the torturing when these cutlets was frying. For whole family it

was torturing, for we children would get only one small cutlet between us. And then Mother and I would be the first ones to the market and to the railroad station to sell these cutlets.

Then no horse meat was left and Mother and I went begging. Some times we didn't have bread or some kind of a porridge and we were all swollen because when we did have bread it was half with the straw.

Then Mother and I began to make shoes. Yes, really. And quite nice ones, too. Everybody in Kursk with no shoes, no nothing, and so Mother and I took a piece of material and made the tops and then with rope sewing—you go like this and then like that—we made the soles. You see them like that in *Vogue* now. We made them in black. Then we go to the village and change them for bread and for cottage cheese.

We made at first only two pairs; that was all the material we had. But then we get a big piece of green cloth like canvas and make more and more. Every morning I hang them on a string about my neck—quite a beautiful necklace, don't you think?—and go to the market and try to exchange them. As I said, the money lost the value, so I exchange them for food. This enterprise went quite a long time, for shoes was very popular. Even Father and my brother was making shoes, but they would never go to the market to sell. They considered the selling beneath them.

Then my brother found a job in a mill and working all day he got paid two pounds of flour. That was the first time prosperity came—when brother brought home two pounds of flour. I remember how proud he was! Of course, we couldn't use all this flour for family, so Mother made pancakes and exchange them for milk for the little sister, who was very small at that time.

On top of this, Father one day brought home ten pounds of salt. If he had brought home ten pounds of diamonds we would not have been so thrilled. Salt was most expensive and

you could exchange anything for salt. We got bread, butter, cottage cheese. Father got the salt for by now he, too, was in business. You see, at this time hoodalism and vandalism were everywhere in Russia. Hoodalism and vandalism, they come from two things. Either you are so rich and get bored and go and break things, or you are so poor you steal because of the necessity of the life. In Russia it was the necessity of the life and so my father's business was to guard the freight cars when they were in the station. For this he would get seed oil or salt.

We also had by now one other way of getting the most necessary things. As life was so hard in Russia, the government knew they must give something to the people and so they gave them dancing. I tell you, the whole country went wild about dancing. After every show in the movies and in the tee-aters, there was dancing. There was never a continuous show like in the United States; there was one show and then one hour's dancing.

I believe there was not one place that was not for dancing. In every factory after the work, everybody was dancing. In all the big halls where before the Revolution the nobility was gathering, now there was dancing for the people. No past people, you understand, only the new people of the proletariat. And everyone was dancing waltzes and mazurkas.

In every place there was a director of the dance who always spoke in French, never Russian; it was more elegant. "*Mesdames, à gauche,*" he would call out. "*Messieurs, à droite.*" And there were contests where you can always win something practical: two pounds of sugar, five pounds of salt, a big loaf of the best black bread or some sunflower oil.

Father always knows where these contests will be, but he never understand the pleasure of dancing; he is only interested in the prizes. Really, the prizes were such a big help in the house that frequently Mother asked, "Don't they dance for kerosene somewhere tonight?" or "Is there a contest any

place to win the cereal?" My mother took these things very seriously.

Now my brother was one of the best dancers in Kursk and he and I can almost always win the contests; but usually we weren't speaking to one another. One of the strongest remembrances of my childhood is that somebody in the family is not on speaking terms with somebody else. Sometimes for months Father will not speak to Mother, and brother and I will not speak to each other. We weren't only on unfriendly grounds; we were on fighting grounds. I was very imaginative and temperamental while he was a down-to-the-point person. If I touch his books, he will be not talking.

Well, the director of the dance will announce, "The prize for the next dance, which will be a mazurka, will be two pounds of sugar," and my brother will come and get me and without speaking a word, we will dance this mazurka and win the prize. Then smiling and chatting nicely, we will go up to the director and accept the prize; then separate and never speak again until the next contest.

With the pressure of the life somewhat eased by these prizes and by my father's and brother's jobs, Mother thought I had enough work and should go back to school. So I did and there I met a girl whose parents to me was very rich. When I went home with her I saw for the first time a piano in a private home. There was a soft chair, too—oh, everything seemed so beautiful. So I came home and told my mother about the piano and that the girl was taking music lessons. Of course, my mother say you know to have a piano is impossible, but she make a cake and a pair of shoes and she get a little jar of kerosene and she make the agreement with the musical teacher to give me lessons. Then my mother and I made a drawing of the keys—we make white keys and black keys very narrow and paste them on the window sill. Then when I would go to

the teacher and she would give me *do re mi fa,* I'd go home and prepare the lesson on the window sill.

Mother would spare me all of the house tasks so I can practice. "Nila, play the piano," she would say and then she would sit there with the sad eyes and listen while my fingers went up and down on the window sill. If my little sisters made too much fuss, she would order them, "Hush, can't you hear Nila is playing the piano?" I played the most beautiful kind of music that only Mother and I heard.

By now the Soviets had Kursk and Mother learned you can apply for the piano and they will give you one free of charge. The Soviets had a barn full of all kinds of pianos; they confiscated them from the rich. All you have to do is go to the Commissariat of Education and fill out a form that you are a peasant family and have four children who you want to give a musical education to, so my mother and brother went there and the man say, "Go ahead and choose what you want."

They could have chosen any piano. Can imagine? But they don't try any; they choose only by the size, a huge concert piano.

One bad thing, though, you must yourself transfer it—the Soviets had no money for transfer. So my mother and brother hired for a bottle of kerosene, which was very expensive, a man with a platform with rolling things under it and brought the piano to the house.

We lived in a little house with one room with a big stove and a small porch. My mother and father slept on two very narrow things built on two sides of the porch, their feet overlapping, and all the children slept in the room. My brother slept on a box and we three girls slept in one big bed.

At first it seemed absolutely impossible to get the piano on the inside, but there it was already on the outside and a bottle of kerosene paid, and so Mother said, "Don't worry, we'll get it in if we have to throw everything in house out."

What a terrific establishment getting that piano inside! We just about tore the house apart. We take the doors out; we throw the bed out; we throw the box out. Then we manage it. You ask where we sleep? Oh, everything was just fine. My sisters and I sleep under the piano and my brother slept on top of it.

But that first day we were all trembling and pale about what Father would say when he came to the room and saw the piano. Mother was ready to fight for the piano until she died, so we children feared there would be a terrible row.

And so the father came. "What is this?" he asked.

Mother say, "A piano."

"Throw it out the house!" shouts Father.

"Over my dead body," Mother answer. "Children need the musical education. Now after the Revolution we want the good things; we've lived long enough in darkness."

Mother, you see, already picked up these meeting words.

Father shouts, "I'll go and never come back."

Mother said nothing, but her face was stubborn.

So Father went out and slammed the door. We children felt very badly, but Mother wasn't worried; she knew he had no place to go. After a little while she said to me, "Nila, go find your father and bring him home."

I went to the square with the benches and there was Father sitting and I told him we want the piano more than anything.

"But where will you sleep?" Father ask.

I told him we had saved the mattresses from the bed.

"All right," he said, "I'll come home if I never have to hear the thing."

Still there was one serious problem. The piano took up the length of the room completely and the problem was where to sit and play the piano. Finally I had the idea. We would put the stool outside of house and play the piano through the window!

Nobody in Kursk was surprised at this. In summer the young people gathered around the window and we danced on the street. In one month my brother learned to play whole dances. He had a magnificent air. He played Mazurkas, waltzes, anything he heard played. It was real wonderful as can be. We sold tickets and we became the attraction of all the young people around. When winter came we had to sit on the window sill to play.

But, oh, there was one sad thing. When the real piano came it was clear for Mother and me that I can't play anything at all. We never discussed it, but she realized it and I realized it. Just quietly she never offers any more cakes or kerosene or anything for the teacher and I just quietly stop going for the lessons.

3

An Absolute Hero!

EVERYBODY IN RUSSIA wants to go to Moscow and so do I. So when I was eighteen I went all by myself in a car for the cattle—there was no other kind of railroad car after the Revolution.

My mother was very against it. "How you going to live there?" she ask me.

"I don't know," I answer truthfully, "but I will do something."

The first day I walk up and down, up and down, looking for a place to stay. And while I walk up and down I see a very old lady with two big bundles and she fell down. I came to her and said, "Let me help you," and so we walk and walk together until we came where she lived. She'd like to give me some tea, she said, but I told her I'd rather have some place to live and so she said she would put a bed in the corridor of her house for me.

Everybody who stayed in this house walked through this corridor; nevertheless, she put a mattress on a trunk for me there and hung some green curtains around the trunk and I lived there for a year. Her name was Matryona and her hus-

band worked in a perfume factory. The very first time I ever smelled perfume was when he gave me a little bottle.

And now I will tell you a wonderful story. A real beautiful story. I found work at the very famous Agricultural Exposition in Moscow. It was the first big thing the Soviets ever did. They wanted to have this Exposition and impress the whole world, and I got a job washing the floor in the pavilion. I made this job quite nicely and was promoted to look after the tickets of the people who come to the Exposition.

Every day I watch the tickets and every day a Red Army man, whose name was Grisha, was standing there to be on guard that nothing would be stole. Well, early one afternoon we were standing there, watching, when suddenly there appeared the most beautifully dressed woman with the big hat and the man with the long beard and the woman has a big, beautiful bouquet of flowers from the Exposition in her hand.

And there I was, standing very badly dressed with no shoes, but politely I said, "Comrade, your pass for the flowers," for you see, nobody was supposed to go out of the Exposition with flowers or bundles or anything without a pass, and this made the man mad and he pushed me hard with his stiffened-out arm.

Then I was mad and I said, "Grisha, arrest them both!"

So Grisha arrest them and escort them with a rifle through the whole Exposition to the main entrance where the offices were, and when he arrived with them there, it was complete confusion. The man was the Vice-Commissar of Justice of Soviet Republics. His name was Beloborodov, which means "white-bearded one." Quickly poor Grisha was taken off the job and arrested.

Then I went to the place where I lived and said to my landlady, "Grandma, I'll soon be arrested and executed because today I ordered the arrest of Vice-Commissar of Justice," and immediately she started to bake the bread to prepare me for the

prison. You see, there is the custom that relatives and friends can come to the prison and bring packages of food for the prisoner. There is even a special name in Russia for this package—*peredatcha.*

The next day a military man appeared and walked me to Lubyanka. Everything terrible is there: secret police officials, militia, prisons, everything. It is the most known, the most horrifying name there is. You don't need to say "prison"; you just say "Lubyanka" and you already say the most horrifying place. Everything that human being can fear was concentrated in this one word, *Lubyanka.* When we got there, I saw Grisha sitting without belt or rifle. They take everything from him.

"Nila, what happens to us?" he ask.

"I don't care," I answer. "We only do our duty."

Then I go into this long, beautiful room and the Head Commissar is there—I recognize him by the pictures in the papers—Comrade Krylenko, and this Beloborodov and seven or eight other men sitting around a long conference table.

And here I come, this quietly looking girl, without any shoes and the dress straight cut, without a belt, and short hair, and I stand at the foot of the table.

"Do you know this man?" the Head Commissar ask.

"Yes," I answer.

Then he say, "Comrade Beloborodov, tell your story."

So Beloborodov went on and on saying how terrible I was, how awful I behaved.

Then it was my turn and I stood straight and motionless, both arms close to my side, like a soldier at inspection, and I made my speech. Very calmly I say, "Comrade Beloborodov, you are lying."

There was complete silence in the room. Everybody knows I could be executed.

Then I say, "All I did was to ask you politely for the pass for the flowers and because your woman was so beautifully

dressed you pushed me and humiliated me. I was only standing there, serving on my post, doing my duty."

Then the most unbelievable thing happened. The Head Commissar got up and walked all around the table and put his hands on my shoulders and said, "If everybody, Comrade Shevko, will be as honest as you are and be not afraid to fight for his rights, the Soviet Republics will be as strong as can be. I'm proud to be a citizen of the same country as you." And he leaned down and kissed me.

"I will not be shot?" I ask, unable to believe my ears.

"Certainly not. Go and work and do your duty for the Republic."

Then he say to Beloborodov, "I am ashamed of you! I am ashamed of you! I am ashamed of you!"

Grisha and I rode back to the Agricultural Exposition in the Head Commissar's car. It was something! Never before in my life had I been in a car and here I am going through Moscow in this big, black car with chauffeur. Whether it was a Packard or a Cadillac I do not know—I know nothing in those times about cars—but it was terrific.

When we came to the Exposition, they gave a month's salary for me and Grisha and a raincoat and pair of shoes. They also put a very patriotic story in the paper—it was one of the three times my name was ever in a Russian newspaper—and after that when people came to the Exposition and the guards show them around, they say, "Here is the wheat and here is the girl which arrested the Vice-Commissar."

Then when the Exposition was over the officials gave me ten pounds of sugar and a ticket to Kursk. You see, they have passes to give to the people to come to the Exposition from all over the country, and so they gave me one of these and I went home a hero. An absolute hero!

4

Adventure in Kirghizia

After a short while at home I returned to Moscow and found a job as a packer in a tea factory named Red Rose. I did this for two years until 1925. The tea came in big bundles from China and the minute it arrived it was put on electric conveyers for the workers to package. At first I loved it, for the Chinese put in presents: aluminum rings, knives, little dolls, little gods—very charming little things; but always watching was the NKVD man to see if the Chinese sent anti-Soviet propaganda. If the NKVD man sees anything in writing in Chinese quickly he picks it up.

I worked there for a salary not very high, but everybody who works there gets one pound of tea and a pound of candy a month which is deducted from the wages. I smell and drink so much tea I never want to see any again as long as I live.

All the time I worked there the managers were urging us to produce more and more. They would take a group who works very fast and measure how much they do and give us a new quota; but it was physically impossible to do it and so I organized a sit-down strike. Then I and everybody that strikes is fired.

But before I was fired a very important thing happened. In one of the meetings organizing for the strike I met an exceedingly good-looking man named Karl Gahlin, but who everybody called Karel. He was from the intellectual, cultured family. His father was college educated and he, too, was educated. He was a poet, a writer and very active in the youth movement. He and his friends so beautifully talk in very high language, using German and French phrases. And Marcel Proust he was reading.

He was also a very crazy man. He had very revolutionary ideas and didn't believe in being nicely dressed. When a big hole comes in the heel of his socks, he turns it tipsy down and wears the hole on top, on the instep. And when the herring is passed, he cuts the herring with the scissors, talking all the time beautifully about Kant.

I can't understand what he found in me. I was still very homely. My hair was cut short, for at this time in Russia nobody ever heard about the permanent. The first time I heard permanent introduce into Russia, it sounds like a curse word, You permanent!

So I used to say to Karel, for always the Russians loved to—how you say this in English?—loved to criticize ourselves, but not really mean it, just say it—"Karel, how can you love me, a very simple peasant woman, a *baba*, something ignorant, stupid, not good-looking, no manners, no standing, no nothing?" And he would deny this things; but one day he answered, "I don't understand it myself." That taught me never to ask again.

Nevertheless, it was 100 per cent true. I was then very ugly and ignorant. Now I'm polished by life and by coincidence with people. Now, when I'm with the people at a dinner party or on the platform, I know how to hold the interest with my mind, but at that time I was very unsure of myself. Still, Karel courted me heavily and finally I married him.

Shortly afterwards, we saw these posters that the country wants teachers for the people in Kirghizia and Karel and I decided to sign up. I didn't think so much about the poor Kirghizians; it just seemed to me such a beautiful adventure and there was nothing to hold us in Moscow. In five minutes we could pack the books. For both of us not one suitcase of things.

The government paid our way and gave us quite nice rations —cans of sardines and some rice and two boxes of shoe polish. How we could cook the rice on the train nobody knows, so we exchange the rice and the people who get it are mighty happy. And here we went. Not on a freight car this time, but on a passenger car, third class, with hard benches, but all the classes were the same then in Russia.

It was about six days on the train to Tashkent, which is the capital of Uzbekistan and is very Asiatic. The men wear little round hats and decorate themselves with flowers behind the ears. And they have tea houses with no chairs and they drink tea and talk about all beautiful things. For instance, everybody will sit on the floor and drink tea and there will be chosen a subject to make a song about. One time it was love; one time, Lenin. They must compose the words and music; and they have little instruments—something like guitars. I loved the best the moment when everybody will be sitting very seriously and the man will touch the instrument and begin his song. They don't applaud, but the one who gets the most *thank yous* wins the contest. The one who was singing the love for friend was the winner of the love contest.

From Tashkent we went four more days on the train to what is now called Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakstan. It was the heart of apples country, and it was the season. How wonderful they were, and so cheap! Here was a different life! I ate so many I got the dysentary.

At Alma Ata we took two horses and a wagon covered like

the wagons in Western movies and we went twelve days through prairies and hills, the most unspoiled country one can imagine with pheasants walking about. This land had only been discovered and joined to Tsarist Russia twenty-eight years before the Revolution. It was the most romantic honeymoon. My husband made up the most beautiful poetry and I felt I'm very lucky with a husband who loves to write poetry.

We came to this lake with salt water named Issyk-Kul, which means Holy Water in English. It has such a legend. Right there where the lake was lived a king, and every day the king called for a new barber to come and shave him. Every time the barber went he was killed, until finally only one barber remained in the whole kingdom. This barber loved very much a beautiful girl, and she and he knew it was his last day. He kissed his parents and fiancée good-by and he was brought into the presence of the king. When the king was shaved, the barber saw he has goat's ears.

Then the barber was taken to prison to be killed, but on the way to the prison, he whispered the secret to the well in the courtyard. The well got so angry it came and came and came and covered all the land and the palace. But when the water was coming up and up and up, a golden horse appeared and took the barber and his sweetheart on his back and swam to safety on the outside of the walls. The lake is salty because so many people cried and suffered so.

The lake is situated between two mountains and to get around it you have to travel many, many miles. My husband and I went as the only passengers on a small boat that was carrying a very rough pasturage that you feed to cattle, and the most terrific storm came. The lake is like it's in a canyon and, such a draft! The waves were much more high than on the ocean.

Instead of being three days on the lake we were on it fifteen days and then we weren't across it. The funeral stories were

already written about us. All was broken. The management was broken. The captain and two sailors were swept overboard and killed. Only Karel and I and three members of the crew were left and Karel was sick all the time. Do you know how the three sailors and I spent the time? Cards we were playing. Tied by ropes to the mast, we played cards. Sometimes waves slipped right over us, but we held the cards close to the breast and went on playing. Believe me I'm telling you 100 per cent true.

For water to save us from thirst we drank eggs—they were as smashed as smashed potatoes. So we made a dough of this rough pasturage and salt water and flapped it around a pot which we heated on the outside with coals.

Drinking these eggs and eating this bread, I remember so distinctly thinking it was as normal as can be. Nothing unusual or heroic about it. I just accepted the life.

Karel called me a peasant and hated me. He said very bitterly, "I now understand why Russia remained for 300 years under the tsars. You peasants just accept whatever comes and go on living."

Finally the storm quieted and we drifted toward shore where there were some huts. We threw the people there a long rope which they tied to a tree and then came out in two little boats and took us off. The people there were Kirghizians and they never before had seen white people. They are very Oriental with dark brown skins and slanting eyes. They have a very queer idea of what's beautiful. The woman's breasts come down to their knees. Why, they can even take them and throw them over their shoulders. They put holders with heaviness in them on the ends to stretch them. Then they dress with a kind of coat that is open so you can see all this—believe me, much more open than the Jane Russell. The coat is made of some kind of colored material and is embroidered with beautiful things. They wear turbans on their heads made out of much, much cloth. The most chic is how many yards you can turn

around the head. It's a specialty like the John Frederics to turn the material around and around.

At night they have holders around their necks on which they sleep so as not to disturb this one. Some time they don't take them off for months and months and you can imagine when they take them off one mass of rotten things. Most horrible sight one can imagine. Anyway, they never wash except to wash themselves with their own sweat.

The weather was terribly hot—it was August—but the men wore fur hats and big, heavy coats of cotton. That's the way to save yourself from the heat; you perspire so it saves you.

As for myself, I wear a leather jacket with belt right here and skirt and very heavy man's shoes. Only time I got a profit for big feet was during this time under the Soviets. The woman with little, delicate feet had trouble, but every man's shoe fitted me absolutely.

I remember on these shoes were enormous, shiny buckles. The whole village was enchanted with these buckles; they could see their nose and mouth and everything in them. It really was funny about the things you could get in Russia at this time. Suddenly you can get the shoes like Peter the Great was wearing, but can't get the simple stockings. And suddenly you can get the piano, but can't get the onions. I honestly don't know how it was done. I suppose they must have found an old warehouse full of buckles so they put them on everything.

Now to the Kirghizian people back. They were absolutely wild. They have cattle and horses and little huts and when the cattle and horses eat everything, they move to another place. But they are very hospitable. When a visitor is a guest of the house, he not only gets the house, but the wife too.

The sailors from our boat spoke the language and said we were hongry. For a chew of tobacco, they gave us two buckets

of trout. You pay a fortune for one of these trouts in Waldorf-Astoria. It was gold with a black stripe and it was the best thing I ever ate.

As we were still quite far from Karakhol, which was our destination, two of the sailors and I hired three horses and set out to go there. We left Karel, who was still sick, and the other sailor to protect the boat.

It was the most fascinating country—miles and miles of poppies growing to make opium out of. After we were traveling three days, we saw people start to follow us, like in Western movies, and they began to shoot. A bullet came just like this in the back of my shoulder. That's why I can't wear the naked dress; the scar would show.

Fortunately by now we were approaching a camp with a man and cattle and so the people stopped following us. An old woman there put some cobwebs on the wound to stop the bleeding and we went on uneventfully to Karakhol.

My work there was organizing schools for the young and clubs for the woman. We made posters and talks, fighting for the elementary hygiene. There were whole settlements complete with venereal disease and in meetings the people would scratch themselves feverishly and pick wildly at their hair. They never killed the lice; they just throw them on the floor. We understand we first must educate in very simple things.

I was armed, as I went about the area, for the resistance of the kulaks to our work was very great, but we used the guns only in absolute necessity. We were so enthusiastic we argued it's better that the Kirghizians kill us than we kill them and make the resistance more strong.

I lived on a horse and I looked fantastic. I feel always like Sancho Pancha, the servant remember of Don Quixote, for the horse is very small, which is special for the climbing, and my feet almost touch the ground. I wore a black skirt that was

cut so that when you stay on ground it's a skirt and only when on horse, it's pants, and nothing on my head. My God! I loved it!

I had an interpreter at first, but later I learned to speak very well this Kirghizian. It took me some time, though, to get used to the customs. For instance, if you meet a man on the road and he ask you, "Have you any news?" you suppose to say, "I have no news, only old news," for it's very impolite to say you know something he doesn't know.

When you have dinner with a hostess, she takes a wooden bowl, which is a special bowl to eat the yogurt, and she spit in it and rub her hand over it and that is to show you that you are welcome. My God! I throw out now to think about it, but I understand then if I refuse they would not trust me, for it is centuries old, this habit.

Once some other workers and I came to this region where come the best caracul coats and they gave a party in our honor. All of life there is going outside. And how they prepare the meat! My God! They went out and killed the lamb and their specialty is not to lose any blood. They cut open the stomach and take the insides out that's no good and quickly they sew it with the animal threads back up.

A big hole is already prepared in the ground and made hot with stones, and they put the lamb right there and cover it with everything on top and bake it in its own skin and blood and all kinds of herbs.

Kirghizians can go on like camels without food and then they can eat a lot—about ten pounds of meat without exaggeration. Maybe more. Ten pounds is not so much. In Russia there is a saying, "He eats like a Kirghizian." They always can eat and, yet, they can go for days without eating anything. They were very surprised that we demand food every day. Such a bothering.

When the lamb is cooking everybody is sitting like this on ground and it's not polite to talk about what you come for at the beginning. You talk about the surroundings, the mountains, old news, anything. And then they eat in these bowls this milk. They make quite a strong drink from fermented horse milk, called kumis. They now build a whole sanatorium around this kumis. It's the Kirghizian Coca-Cola. They drink gallons. It's a very specific strong taste and it's so good for you. Oh, I just loved it! I could also drink gallons.

Now the meal is ready. They take this lamb and peel off the skin and the flesh is pink and juicy. The most delicious thing on earth.

Then they divide the people in three groups. The man is the most important thing. Woman is just woman. Man and boy sit in one circle, woman and girls in another, and dogs in another. But I was unpredictable. To put me with man? Impossible. Put me with woman? Impossible. Put me with dogs? Impossible. So I was put all by myself.

The whole lamb is put in the man's circle and one man cuts a piece and brings it to me. God! it was a three- or four-pounds piece and simply delicious.

Then this man cut nice bits for themselves and when they eat up to the end, they throw it to woman. They don't even look where they throw. Z-zh-ip, one more bone for woman. I sit right between the man and woman and the bones z-zh-ip right over my head. Then when woman finishes bone, z-zh-ip to dogs. It was the funniest thing you can see—dogs sitting on their hind legs, waiting. They don't close their circle; they just sit nicely, waiting woman.

Oh, the amount you can eat of this meat in this air! We went on and on until all the lamb was ate. I had the time of my life.

Karel was not there. He never went on these trips into the

interior. He was a big shot. He was editor of the publishing house for the textbooks for the schools. Sometimes I was going on trips without him for five or six weeks.

Once I came to a village where I was already before. I must explain each region has it own authority and already a mayor was chosen there. I went to see the mayor for I wanted to talk to woman; I wanted to have a musical festival. While sitting in mayor's hut, he gave me this kumis and tried to talk me out of the festival. Then I did something I don't understand, except I was young and had drunk a lot of this kumis. I took out my gun and held it in front of me and said to the mayor, "I'll give you fifteen minutes to get woman together. I came here to educate woman and I will educate woman!" So the mayor went about the village with a big whip and made the woman come to the meeting.

If I was ever ashamed of anything, that was the time. Oh, I was ashamed! It came public knowledge that I used my force and gun to bring people together and the kulaks told this story for propaganda. Then I had a public trial. It was not a court that belonged to the country; it was a kind of chosen jury of the people. It was a moral trial. And the decision was: "Comrade Shevko must be ashamed of herself and consider she is not fit to go among the Kirghizian people for three months because she used the force of gun and whip."

I went for a while to the warehouse and packed sets of books for the schools and then I wrote a letter and say, "I'm fully punished. Please do permit me to go back to work." The decision was for me to go back.

And now there comes the races! Every year in Kirghizia they have *alaman-baiga,* which means people's race, and this is the event for which everybody prepare. It doesn't matter your age, sex or anything. It starts ten kilometers outside of Karakhol. There is a mass of horses. They stand behind a line right here. Then the official shoots the gun and there is an-

other line on the other side of Karakhol and who approaches it first wins the race.

I was right here on the side of the first line on a very big, beautiful gold horse. It was not my horse; it belonged to the Commissar of Food of the Kirghiz Republic, though belonged is not the right word, for no private persons could own horses in Russia—they belonged to the government and they still do—and he lent it to me to watch the race. When the official shoot to start the race all the Kirghizians scream, beat their horses with their whips and are off.

Well, all the screaming and whipping frightens my horse and he began to run like the wind. That's the end, I thought, holding on to the saddle for dear life and praying wildly. I am finished. I am ended. Of course, my horse ran first behind the finish line, but then I couldn't stop him. With foam he was covered and racing on and on. Finally, though, he stop itself and immediately I turn around and pick up the situation. I hold the reins with such an air as if I hadn't intended to do anything else except win this Kirghizia-Kentucky derby. They gave me some kind of flowers and my picture was taken, but to the local authorities I was a great disappointment because it was so much better for the policy if a local man could win.

All over the word spread I won this derby and I never need any more my gun to collect people for my meetings. I got so popular they call me by my first name. Instead of Comrade Shevko they call me Nila Comrade. In Kirghizia when they respect you they say "Comrade" after the name. By the time I leave Kirghizia I had many woman friends and I had organized kindergartens, reading circles, folk dancing and folk singing.

I left because the altitude is very high here and often my veins would break and the doctor say if I want to survive I must be sent to a different altitude. Also, I had had a miscarriage while I was working so hard. I got pregnant, but I didn't stop work. I never thought of it. All Kirghizian woman go on

horse until they give the birth. One day while I was riding I got uncomfortable and I gave my horse a little jerk and he swerved to one side and I went down very smoothly. I suppose I must have been dozing, but I started to bleed and the child was born dead. For some time I was quite sick. But it was the altitude that made me leave. The doctor ordered me to go, and so Karel and I said good-by to Kirghizia.

5

A Sailor in the Russian Merchant Marines

VERY SOON after we returned from Kirghizia, Karel was sent to Leningrad as editor of a book publishing house and I went with him. Karel was a member of the Communist party, but I wasn't because I wasn't sufficiently interested to qualify myself, and so I was not important and had to go to work at a factory that was making doors and windows and wooden parts for railroad cars. I assure you it was not because I choose it. I went to the employment bureau of Leningrad and said I want to work and this was the job they gave me.

While I was making these doors and windows, I signed up for parachute training. To parachute jump in Russia at this time was just as fashionable as to give the cocktail party in America. Nobody had to learn to jump, but almost everybody did.

At first I do everything on the floor. I learned how to put the parachute together and how to take it apart. Then I practice jumping from a tower. And then came the real jump. I was scared to death and had to be pushed out. There was nothing romantic about it. No thrill at all.

But the next time I will get the whole pleasure, the instructors said. The first time is bad for everybody, but the second time will be wonderful. But the second time was even worse. I just felt green and throw out and got bruises on my knees.

I can do anything, but I honestly don't believe I'm very brave. Once about this time I was in a boat with Karel and his hat flew into the water and without one moment's hesitation, I jumped into the water and brought it back. Everybody thought I was brave, but I was just saving the hat. It was a most expensive hat; it cost $5.00.

I worked at this factory for some time and then I want to see the world. I understand I can go to the Merchant Marines and apply to be a sailor. I had a nice, clean biography. It was absolutely pure like a white page—nothing written there. I came from poor family with no capitalists, which was all they required. So here I went.

It was very strange, I suppose you think, Willie, this married life. I don't understand it myself. I loved my husband very much, and he loved me. It was just that I was young and crazy to travel and Karel at this time was so involved in his work.

I was assigned to a big freight boat, the *Karl Marx*. It was carrying the sunflower seeds and also butter. For weeks I hadn't seen the butter. Russia exported everything: butter, ham, caviar. There was a crew of fifty-two people, fifty man and two woman.

I don't know why, but I cut my hair then with a bang. I really looked like a gangster. Not the third-degree gangster, but the lowest gangster. I wore a brown flannel shirt and black skirt. There was no uniform; you wear what you want.

Just before we sailed some kind of political commissar came on the boat and made a long speech how you are supposed to behave highly. All the crew, new and old, was given this lecture on behavior. We must remember we represent the new Soviet Republic abroad. This, you see, was in 1926. We must not in-

volve in any political situation, but if we are involved, we must remember we are Soviet citizens and even if we are not members of the Party we must stick to the Party line. And he gave us to understand we had members of the family left behind.

But I didn't mind the lecture. I was afraid of only one thing—that they take me off the boat. Up to the last minute I was afraid they take me off. Only to travel! Only to live! I sent a telegram to Mother, "I'm going abroad. Thinking of you."

The machinery start! I thought, that's it. Then the whistle blew which means all the crew must step ashore and be lined up. There came four NKVD man with four German wolfdogs, and everybody shout out his name. Then the NKVD man say that if anybody is hidden in the boat these dogs will tear him to pieces. The man standing next to me turned a green color and I got terribly frightened. It was something so undignifying hunting down the man with the dog. All this time, you must remember, I was an idealistic Soviet.

Well, they went on the boat and started with the top deck and suddenly you heard this barking and screaming and saw the NKVD bringing a man all bloody and his flesh torn away. My God, I don't like to think about it! Then we find out that two sailors were trying to smuggle out this priest. The boat was running on coal and in this place where the coal is they dig a hole and put a pipe so the priest can breathe, but the dogs find him and almost tear him to pieces. A very illustrating story of life in Russia. I was actually sick.

They took the priest and the two sailors away and we went back on the boat. When we came to our cabins it was just as if a cyclone came. Everything was on floor. The NKVD search everything.

Finally we sailed, but here I must explain that when you sail from Leningrad you go through the Neva River and a narrow strait until you come to this island and then on to the ocean. Up to this island is Russian water but when you go be-

hind this island you are out of Russian water and the NKVD boat can't go. The crew was praying to get on the outside of this island and I was praying too. Why I felt so guilty and afraid I don't know. I had nothing behind me but the best work, but I was affected by this fear.

Then just when we were on the Russian side of this island the machinery went bump, bump, bump. We understood the captain had got word to stop the boat. The NKVD, we knew, must have been questioning the two sailors and they had told something. And so it was. They had told about one more man and the NKVD came and got him and took him off the boat.

I was a sailor third class and I did everything—washing the floors, polishing the brass and doing everything that they call in Russia unqualified work. I organized a literary circle and was so happy for it was such a success. Man attend it 100 per cent.

We got our money in English—nine pounds a month—about $45. If a sailor has a family at home they took something for family, and pay them in rubles. Also we got a ration: sardines, cocoa, herring and all like these things. None of us eat it. We always save it and when we come to a Russian port there will be a lot of people there waiting, for they know every Russian sailor gets this ration. We weren't permitted to sell it, but it was the most profitable thing there is.

We came to Hamburg. The first officer called me to his office. "I hope you do understand," he said, "that I'm not capitalistic inclined, but we are coming to a capitalistic country and Russian citizens must look a little more presentable in capitalistic country where they notice everything."

He was right to speak to me. I was poorly dressed. The boat furnished working clothes—overalls and wooden shoes that went *clack, clack, clack,* but I had nothing for the leisure. A sailor said he would take me to a place where I could get cheap things. I bought shoes made of material—not even leather, and

an advertised suit. I spent altogether $3.25. I can't tell you how I hated to spend money then on clothes.

We were the first Soviet boat that came to Germany after the war. The Russian consulate gave a dinner for the crew and for the first course we had in little glass dishes a mixture made from cherries and other fruits and we just giggled and giggled; we thought we were so capitalistic. And they gave us presents. I got a thermos, the first one I ever saw, to keep drinks hot and cold. My God, why I need it?

While we were in Hamburg the machinery of the boat broke down and we had to stay there for six weeks. Two sailors and I rented a bicycle and we went to many places in Germany. Then we came back to Hamburg and we bought together one bottle of champagne for $2.00 and saw night club entertaining. Girls were making stomach dances. They had on chiffon pants and small brassieres that just covered these little things. And their stomachs start to make this ocean movement. Believe me I never went through such an experience as these stomach dances. I saw it in its full swing—my first capitalistic entertainment. The sailor I was with got so excited with this movement, he cried, "God, isn't that something?" but in Russian even more stronger, and slapped this strange woman, almost naked, who was next to him, on the back. And immediately the man with naked woman hit him between the eyes. The sailor doubled his fist and hit him back. Then I was fighting. Then everybody threw chairs just like in movies. My God! how we were fighting! It was beautiful! People were so electrified from this stomach dance they had to discharge the excitement.

But in the middle of the fight the police came and here we were in the police station. Then somebody notified the captain and here we were back on the boat under arrest. Every day we were lectured and lectured on how to behave in capitalistic country.

Then we went to Holland, Gibraltar and Constantinople. A

man in a restaurant in Constantinople told me he'd like to give me a present. Of course, I love presents and he gave me an amber stone on a chain. It was the first piece of jewelry I ever had in my life and I thought it very beautiful.

Then we went to Odessa, and from Odessa we went to many other places. Altogether my sailoring days lasted nearly a year. When they were finished, I had no money whatsoever. I had spent all of it in the countries where we stopped to see how the people lived.

I wanted to bring something for the mother, but I had nothing except some antique flowers I bought in Gibraltar. Nothing else. My sweater was in shreds and my shoes torn to pieces, but I did have enough sardines from my ration to buy a ticket to Kursk.

As I neared our house, I saw Mother talking with the woman from next door. They were outside sitting, eating the sunflower seeds. I slipped around and came in the back door and I heard Mother telling the most beautiful tale about me. How I was going about abroad, everywhere doing first-class traveling; all the places I was staying and all the beautiful clothes I was wearing.

And there I was in the old rags! Oh, how guilty I feel to break this beautiful tale she was telling! I really couldn't give her up before this woman; but after a while I say, "Sh-sh-sh," and she heard me and came inside. I gave her the sardines that were left to quiet her down. With tears in her eyes she begged me not to go out in the town, and so for two days I stayed in the house.

By now my brother Nikolai was a member of the Communist party and was assistant manager of a repair factory shop. It was a small thing, but nevertheless he was quite prominent and he gave me the coupons for some material and Mother made me a dress. She wanted me when I went out to say it came from abroad, but it could be plainly seen it was made by the mother.

6

Everything Got More Screwed —You Know, Tight

AFTER A SHORT VISIT with Mother, I rejoined Karel. Almost immediately he was assigned to work at Khabarovsk, the capital of far east Russia. I accompanied him and in time got work in the employment bureau of the Commissariat of Supply. I was the person to whom a man will come to register for a job; but as everybody in Russia then who takes a job must first be checked by the NKVD to see if somebody in his family was a capitalist or was arrested and is in exile, I will give him a form to fill out and then I will take this form to the NKVD for them to check and say if he may be hired. As I had to go back and forth to the NKVD office for this work, I was furnished with a horse and a two-wheel cart.

This job was very useful to me for by this time Karel was one of the leaders of the underground movement against Stalin and I was in a position to get a lot of inside information. I wasn't really interested in politics, but Karel was so involved that I soon came under his influence. Now, instead of reading the Pushkin poetry and talking Proust, we talk the horror of Stalin coming to the power.

You see, by now the whole of Russia was torn very much apart. Up to the middle of the twenties, the Communist body of Russia and its leadership was cemented by danger. The Civil War, you remember, had ended only in 1923 and there were isolated flare-ups as late as 1925. Also, it was cemented most strong by Lenin's will and terrific personality.

Then in 1924 Lenin died and Stalin began to make his claim for power and to intensify the gathering into his hands of all control; but, you understand, there were many Communist party leaders, Trotsky being by far the most important, who were in opposition to him.

The Oppositionists wanted a real democracy within the Communist party. They were perfectly willing to have a dictatorship of the country by the Communist party, but they wanted the party itself to be run democratically. You understand, freedom of discussion about everything.

In the beginning, there was this right to discuss everything openly, but then as Stalin got more strong, everything got more screwed—you know, tight—it began to be dangerous to say you were for what Lenin believed. Then all public discussion of politics was stopped in newspapers. Stalin said he stopped it because of the demand of millions of Communists. These Communists asked, so he said, why to give the platform to the Opposition?

When the first news of this censorship spread it seemed impossible. People wouldn't believe it. They thought after the Revolution they can express themselves about anything. It was then that Karel and the other underground workers got a printing press on the black market—in Russia you could get anything on the black market, even Stalin's soul—and every week they print articles explaining the danger of what Stalin is doing to Russia. Then they got hold of Lenin's testament—it was rumored everywhere in Russia, you remember, that the Stalin-

ists drugged and murdered Lenin—and in this letter Lenin wrote that Stalin was very rude and not a loyal comrade. Of course, this letter was the most powerful thing in the underground movement. They print thousands and thousands and put them in people's mailboxes and everywhere possible.

Naturally Karel and the others were very much afraid the printing press will be found and taken out, so I solved this problem by carrying it around with me in a small box that is in the cart.

The NKVD went wild and crazy. They search everywhere—all the houses—and can't find it. One day while they're going through our room, tearing the floor apart, the walls, everything, I went right in the yard of the NKVD with this machine and tied my horse to the post—the NKVD yard has posts just like they have in front of every bar in Western movies—and there it was sitting during the entire search.

Even though they don't find the machine in our room, my husband becomes very suspect, so we get tickets and go to Moscow. There my husband became more and more involved in the underground; but I was not involved. I wanted to study; I wanted to study everything from the beginning, so I enrolled in a preparatory school for the university and studied literature, physics, algebra, chemistry, geometry, history, German—at this time all students in Russia had to study German. We went very fast because we are supposed to have already had everything, but you understand my generation had a broken education. This preparatory school was to systematize what you know.

It was now 1927 and I was asked by the underground to go one evening to this apartment of an Oppositionist and make one long and two short rings. Now I must explain this. In Russia many families live in one apartment. For instance, there were eleven rooms in the apartment where Karel and I lived

and so eleven families lived there, sharing one bath and kitchen. We lived in a constant symphony of short and long rings. Our ring was three short and five long.

Now back to this man of the Opposition. His ring was two short and one long, but I made a mistake and did two long and one short which saved me, for when the door was opened by an NKVD soldier he didn't know I was ringing the Opposition and ask, "Yes?"

Immediately, I guess the NKVD had set a trap. Somebody had tipped them off that a person from the underground is bringing material this evening to the Opposition. So they wait in this place and arrest everybody who comes to this man and detain all the others so nobody can leave and warn the person with the material.

At the moment the NKVD soldier ask me "Yes?" I see in the corner of the hall a mannequin bust and I answer very quietly, "I'd like to see the dressmaker." The soldier turn around and ask if somebody like this lived there and a woman say, "Yes."

So, I just walk to the last door and knock and a woman say, "Come in."

I first had the desire to whisper, "I'm in trouble, please help me," but then I decide I didn't have the right to involve this woman, so I say boldly so NKVD man can hear if he's listening, "I want to get a dress made."

"Who sent you?" she ask.

Without hesitation I give the name of a good friend I had known at the factory.

Now I don't know whether she guess or not that I was in trouble, but anyway she say, "Oh, yes," as if she knew this person, and begin to take my measurements. Then she ask, "What material you like?"

Since it is an imaginary dress, I choose the best material. And then I get very busy and design for her this dress that will never be made.

All the time I'm thinking how to get rid of the secret material. My impulse is to go to the bathroom and get rid of it; but I am afraid that will arouse the suspicions of the NKVD, so I ask her for a glass of water and I swallow it.

Then I ask her what is this all about in the house and she say, "A man here is a counterrevolutionary and they are trying to catch the people working with him."

Then I open the door and say loudly, "I think it will be a beautiful dress," and immediately the soldier come and say, "I'm sorry, Comrade, you'll have to stay here."

This was in the evening and all night I was there, but I had plenty of company. A neighbor came for matches and was trapped and then her husband got worried and sent the boy to see what was the matter with the mother and he was trapped; then the husband came and he was trapped. Then the milkman came; then a beggar with the smelling clothes; then the postman, and that was a problem. The NKVD said the postman had to stay, but he made such a fuss. "The citizens are waiting for their mail," he said. So one of the NKVD officers took the mail from him and brought it back to the post office, but they kept the postman.

By the next morning, there were eighteen in the corridor and eleven were of the Opposition—I could tell from the way they ring the bell, one long and two shorts, and besides there were two or three whom I know very well—but the NKVD kept waiting for the person with the secret material and, of course, I was already there.

All night I was afraid Karel would go crazy not knowing what happened to me but, finally, when they let me and the others, who had not rung the bell for the counterrevolutionary, go home, Karel had not even been there. Only the NKVD. They had torn up everything. Then they had found Karel at an Opposition meeting, arrested him and taken him away.

But where he was? That was the question. Immediately, I

went to one prison and inquire is a man like this there. No. Then I went to another prison, then another. No man like this prisoner is in any of them. Then I learned that the NKVD has some kind of information officer which knows about the prisoners. I went there and there was the longest line one can imagine. I stood hours and hours in this line and when I came to the officer he told me, no, he did not know this man.

Then I was advised to go to this biggest prison in Moscow; there, they thought, were the political prisoners, so I came there and they didn't say yes and they didn't say no. I must come back on the day of his letter. You see, the whole alphabet is divided into six days, which means each man has four letter days in the month. On the man's day, the wife or another relative comes and brings the package and leaves some money, for every prison has a store.

My husband's name, as you know, began with a G and so on G-day I went with this package to this prison, but no man like this there. I run like a mad from one prison to another. For three weeks on this letter day I run and run and run and, when I found him, he was in the same clothes and same underwear as when he was arrested. No toothpaste, no soap, no nothing. I fill out the form and give my package and then I wait for the slip, saying he has received the package. He is permitted to write only the name on the slip.

Every week I went to this prison with the package, but I am terribly worried for I have no money and nothing to sell except Karel's books. In Russia, books are the very best exchange you can have. They are so scarce, you can always take them and get money. But then I didn't feel I should sell the books. Karel had the rarest books; all his life he was collecting.

The only thing for me to do is to stop school and go to work; but unless I fill out an application—and of course I can't do that with my husband in prison—I can only get a job at hard

labor by the day, such as cleaning the streets. So this I do. They don't even ask my name.

When Karel had been in prison for three months, I got a slip to meet him, a formal invitation a . . . a . . . what is this you call this invitation to come to the prison with the warm things? . . . Anyway, it means he has already got his sentence and will be sent into exile. You expect it all the time, but when you get it, it struck you in head.

On the day of the meeting, I come to the inside of prison and a big group of woman are waiting there and I understand it will be a huge party sent away. Then this waiting! My God, this waiting!

When you see prisoners in the movies, they talk through the bars, but not like that in Russia. I was taken inside an absolutely bare room, except with a table in the middle and a chair on each side. I was sitting there not long and there comes Karel with a guard. I was so shocked! I promised myself not to be shocked, but I couldn't help it. He always had such a natural elegance, but they didn't let him shave and he came with the hair and the beard. Still he was smiling.

The NKVD man stood by the table. "You have fifteen minutes," he said. "You must not talk about inside life in prison. You must not talk anything political. You just talk the family matters."

Before I met him, I had millions of things to say, and then suddenly nothing. Very quick, small tears were quickly running.

All the time I am sitting there feverishly thinking how to kiss him good-by.

The NKVD man say, "The fifteen minutes are up, Citizen." You see, they no longer call me Comrade because I've become a relation of the traitor of the state. "Citizen, you remain in your place." And now he say to my husband, "You get up."

When my husband get up and start to go out and the guard turn his back on me to watch him, I jump with such a lightness that before the NKVD man can do a thing we are in each other's arms. The guard tears us apart, cursing with bad words. Then he push my husband hard and close the door and I am left alone.

The prison is very far from the place where I am living and I walk and walk and the tears are rising and rising. I am positive I will never see my husband again.

I found out somehow—the word spread—that the prisoners would be sent from such and such a station—from the suburb, and so the group of woman—about a hundred of us—went there and sure enough there was a long train waiting. Then about midnight came the black crows—they are black trucks but they call them like this from the tsarist days—and they brought hundreds of prisoners and they went into the cars singing "The International." It was the most powerful singing I ever heard in my life. It was in protest to Stalin. They consider themselves the real revolutionists, not Stalin and his party. Then the crowd of woman, weeping, began to sing too. Oh, such a great feeling with these man going to prison, and the NKVD pushing them with their rifles, and the people singing louder and louder. Just remembering it, I'm all covered with the goose.

Then they were gone!

For two months I didn't hear anything from my husband and then came a letter from him that he's in exile in the town of Chita in Siberia and he's got a job there working again with a publishing house and he wants me to come to see him. Then there came another letter, which a man brought, and I learned that Karel, right there in exile, began to organize the underground movement.

I went to some friends of Karel's in the movement and told them I wanted to go to see him and they organized me a ticket.

You see, all students who were studying in Moscow got tickets in the summer and winter vacations from the government to visit their homes. So the underground somehow got hold of some of these tickets and they filled out one for me to go to Chita. It was written Nina Tarasova of the Moscow Technical Institute—and here I went.

One friend, who was quite a famous author, brought me a big, gray, heavy knitted wool coat with big, fluffy cuffs and collars out of the same wool, but fashioned like fur. I was happy out of my mind. It was the first time I had so beautiful a coat, but it was the biggest mistake of the conspiration. This coat attract such attention from the people when I do not want the attention that I take it off and walk around very cold—it is February—in a shawl, the coat over my arm, and everybody in station ask, "Are you selling something?" I am amazed that I can at this moment even see the eyes of these people.

I went on a car with bunk, bunk, bunk up the sides, and my friends advise me to occupy the highest bunk, so as not to be too much seen, and not to talk to the people.

And in such a manner, after five days, I arrived at Chita, but seventeen or eighteen hours late. So my husband, who of course came many times to station to meet me, wasn't there.

So I put on the beautiful coat and hired a horse and droshky —I had Karel's address with me—and looking haughty with the boring eyes at the provincial town, I rode down the street. It was most fantastic. If Sarah Bernhardt would arrive to this town, she wouldn't have been half so impressive.

To tell the truth I was so involved in being a famous actress, I pass right by Karel and not even see him until he yell, "Nila," and run and jump in the droshky.

He had a room, but the toilet was away back in the yard and there was just a little road among the snow; really, the snow was so deep you couldn't even see yourself. There at the end was this little house with one hole as cold as hell—right now

I feel this cold coming—every time you have to go to the bathroom it was the most torturing thing one can imagine.

My husband asks can I do something for him. There was a very famous old Bolshevik who was also in exile, an overnight trip away, and my husband wants me to take a paper to him. Of course, my husband can't leave his town; he must report to the NKVD authorities every day. The plan was for the message to be wrote inside of two Russian cigarettes, which I was to carry in a cigarette case. The only fly in bottle was that I didn't smoke and it will look ridiculous for me to carry cigarette case in hand and never smoke. So Karel and some of his friends gave me lessons in smoking for two days. I was to learn with the ease how to strike the match, light the cigarette and puff the smoke.

Then the cigarette case was arranged—six cigarettes on down side, six on up side. In the middle of the six cigarettes on one of the sides were the two with this most important message. I must remember, of course, on which side the two secret cigarettes are and, if anything goes wrong, I must find a way to swallow them.

Now I start on the journey and I have to travel with cigarette case in a more elegant way. A ticket was bought for me second class and the seat was soft like a cushion. Well, I was standing in corridor, looking out of the window, when from the next compartment came a very high NKVD man and ask, "Will you give me a light?" Then he ask me my name and I gave him the same name I had used on the ticket from Moscow, Nina Tarasova. Then he asked me to join him for dinner and he ordered wine and we talked about many things. He was going to the same town I was. In fact, he drank and talked so much that I soon realized that he was going to arrest some Oppositionists. The Oppositionists were growing much too strong, he said; the Stalin party must be more severe with them.

It was clear to me, of course, that the old Bolshevik would be among the first to be arrested, but I answered, "You are ex-

actly right. We must not show any softness. We must stop them if we have to put all of them in jail."

So we talked, eating the dinner and sipping the wine, when suddenly he said, "Oh me! What a shame! I'm out of cigarettes. Would you mind very much giving me one of yours?"

Instantly it was an absolute blankness in my mind. Was it the right or the left side I was to offer to a person if it so happens that he wants a cigarette? Many times Karel show me how to open the cigarette case so that such a person will take the cigarette from the side with no message; but now I was so frightened, my blankness was complete. Oh! what I went through you will not believe; but my time was not yet. He took a cigarette from the side with no message.

When we arrived next day, I got away from the train quickly and was going to the address of the people Karel gave me. When I knock, the woman of the house asks have I read such and such a book and that was the password, so I say yes. Then she tells me the old Bolshevik is expecting me and she will take me to him that evening, but I say, "I'm afraid this evening will be too late. Maybe tonight he will be taken to prison." So the wife of the house went for a walk and told the old Bolshevik to walk such and such a place and I will come there and if I see the possibility of talking friendly with him I will ask him for a match.

Now I have left only two cigarettes in the case so when I come where he is we talk like casual friends and I ask him will he have a cigarette and he takes the two. So the drama is finished and I come back uneventful to Chita.

I had three weeks with my husband and they were like a holiday, like a honeymoon. Some friends gave us two pairs of skates and we spent the days skating, reading books and just being together. It was beautiful and peaceful and we were very, very, very happy.

We had been married for three years and it was the first time

I understand how wonderful it can be to live in peace and quiet with a husband—I suppose it was because I was so young when I married that I did not understand this sooner. Anyway, now Karel and I decided I would return to Moscow and arrange things so I could spend the rest of the time with him in exile. And so, back I went to Moscow.

7

The Most Horrifying Prison

When I got back to Moscow from visiting Karel I was really exhausted. One evening I was lying on the bed in this little place in the hall feeling terribly unhappy, thinking about the simple weeks of friendship and love that Karel and I had had, reading together and skating together and walking together. This woman who was cleaning there came and called, "Nila Ivanovna." (They call you in Russia by your name and your father's Christian name: Ivanovna means daughter of Ivan.) "Nila Ivanovna, the NKVD came and they ask for you," she said.

I was so tired, I was lying with my eyes shut and my head hung off the bed in a limp, half-dead fashion, and I thought, oh, my God, if I'll be arrested now after I have been so happy these last three weeks and after I understand how wonderful it can be with my husband! But then I thought I'm not going to run and then there was this specific, loud knock at the door. The little wall did not go all the way up to the ceiling.

"Just a minute until I dress," I said.

When I was ready an officer and two soldiers and the superintendent of the apartment house tried to come in, but there

was no room for all of them so just the officer came in and left the door open so the others can see no agreement can be made.

The officer was a blond, with glasses—very young, tall and intelligent looking, but unpleasant and cold.

"Citizen, this is the order for your arrest and the search of your room," he said, and handed a paper to me.

"I don't care to see it," I said.

"But, Citizen, under Soviet law you must read it and see that it is correct."

I smiled very quietly and said, "And if it isn't correct, what will you do?"

"In such a grave moment as this," he answered, "there is no time for the joke."

So I took the paper. It was just a form, filled out with my name and address. It didn't say why I was arrested, except I was arrested for investigation and my case would be studied.

"Now we will make the search," he said.

He has eyes such a cold, like a fish, and they protrude, and he kept searching everywhere until five o'clock in the morning. Then he called one of the soldiers and ordered, "Call for the car," and then he turned to me and said, "Citizen, get ready. You may take with you three changes of underwear."

"Don't worry," I told him. "I haven't three changes."

"And the toothbrush and soap," he said, "but no paper, no newspapers and no pamphlets of any kind."

So we went out and in front of the house was a big, black, old-fashioned car with the big windows and high wheels, and I said to this officer, "I know it will be a long time before I see Moscow again. Do you mind if we go to the prison by a longer way?"

He didn't talk to me one word, but took the longer way and we drove by the Red Square, the Kremlin, the Moscow River and oh! there was such a stillness—the nature didn't wake up

yet—and everything was the most beautiful and I felt such a sadness.

Then we came to Lubyanka, the most horrifying prison, remember, Willie, and the NKVD man brought me into a big, bare room, very clean, with two benches and a table—it was the cleanest place I yet lived in Russia—and the man left me and the woman came and said, "Undress."

I say, "What you mean?"

She say, "Everything."

She went through every seam with very quick, experienced fingers and me standing there naked. Then she tell me, "Lay down on this bench," and immediately I guess what she is going to do.

"I want you to wash and dry your hands in my presence," I tell her. "Of course, you can refuse and call soldiers who will hold me, but I will fight. I'm not a criminal, but a political prisoner."

So she called a soldier and he brought her a basin and pitcher and towel and she cleaned her hands. Then she searched me.

At this time I had my hair parted on the side with a comb here and I had shoes like boys' shoes with laces, and a cotton petticoat, which I gathered with a string made out of the same material. She took the comb and laces and string, which was a precaution to keep me from hanging myself. I also had something pinned with a safety pin, for I was never very accurate and she took that, too.

"How you want me to dress?" I ask, "with no string in my petticoat?"

"I don't care," she answer.

So I put back on a short shift and some black tights that I wear when I skate. These are very tight and heavy knitted, and they go from the feet up to my waist, and suddenly there I was black like a devil. This things is not only long enough to hang

myself, but hang her, too, but if she takes it away I will be practically naked. I have no girdle, no pants, no stockings—no nothing—except the short shift and this thing.

I see fear on her face for she know not what to do, but finally she make up her mind to allow me to wear it and goes away.

Then I sit and sit and sit and get very hongry. So I go and kick on the door and a soldier comes.

"I'm hongry," I tell him.

"Until all the procedure is finished," he says, "you will get no rations."

"Make it quick then," I say like the general. "Make it very quick."

At last a soldier comes to the room and says, "Citizen Shevko?"

"Yes," I say, for by now I'm too hongry to make any kind of game, and he says, "Follow me."

He brings me to a room with a window with bars and with a very simple bed and one chair. Then he brings me black bread and vegetable soup and hot water with some color like tea and a little piece of sugar and my first thought was, it's not bad, my God! It's not bad! Really it was very magnificent black bread. The plate was metal and there was a metal thing to drink your tea and one metal spoon for tea and soup and everything.

Then they took it away and here I was locked again. The first hours there was such a stillness. You sit in this room and can't go out. Nothing to do. Later, I learned to just sit and imagine myself in all kinds of different places, talking to all kinds of different people, but this was the longest day of my life. Nothing to do. Absolutely nothing.

In the evening they came and took me out to wash and the petticoat was the savior of my life; it was my towel. There were just toilets and basins—no showers. The man bring you there. There was no woman guard, except the searcher. You have five minutes. I was very pleased to be there for it was action. To turn

on the water was action. To see the water running was action. I was just twenty-two and I was always overactioned.

The guard knock on the door. "The five minutes are up," he says.

"I'm not ready," I say.

He knock again on the door. "If you're not ready in two minutes, I'll come in."

So I was ready. He took me back to the cell and brought me my supper and when he took it away, here I was locked again. I was wild like a teegar. I just walk up and down, up and down, up and down. Then I was doing pirouettes from the bed to the floor and from the floor to the bed. Z-zhi-ip. Z-zhi-ip. Z-zhi-ip. Every ten minutes the guard came and looked through this little window in the door. When he saw me sailing through the air, he said it was dangerous and for me to sit down.

Still I am looking for action and so I take the tube with the toothpaste and make a whole painting on the wall—the wall was very darkish. It was a picture of Stalin being taken to the prison. I never made a better design in my life. I drew Stalin with the long mustache, going into the gates of the prison with Lubyanka written across the top. It was unmistakable.

Then I get very quiet and the soldier came and looked through the window and then he went and bring the commandant. I am now laying down in bed and I pay no attention. I never even turn my eyes. I really enjoy myself tremendously.

"By such behavior you make your punishment much more sure," the commandant say to me, and then he say to soldier, "Wipe it off and take the paste away from her."

When they were gone I made a psychological game. I covered myself with the blanket and I pretend I'm rubbing my neck under the blanket.

The soldier watched me through the window and he went to pieces. He thought I was trying to do something to kill myself. He ran again and got the officer.

"Citizen Shevko, get up, please," he order.

"I am not dressed," I say.

"Well, we will leave the room and you can dress."

Action! That's all I want—action. I'm not brave, as I've already told you, but I must have action.

They search high and low the room for the instruments with which I kill myself and, of course, they find nothing.

"I must warn you," the officer then say very pleadingly, "the bad behavior will make more complicated your sentence. You must learn to be patient. Remember you're a prisoner."

"But I will never consider myself a prisoner," I say.

And that was 100 per cent true, for I was a political prisoner and that was why I could get away with all these things. The situation was very different then from what it was later. The prisoners' regime at that time was comparatively mild. You see, Stalin was not yet strong, and he proceeded very cautiously against the Opposition. Indeed, the punishment to Oppositionists for several years was very light. They were given every chance to recant and turn around.

Of course, after Stalin banished Trotsky out of Russia and got complete control, he became much more implacable and then the horrors in the Soviet prisons really grew up.

So I say to the officer I do not consider myself a prisoner and he went away.

Then seven days go by and nothing happens. Nothing. I kept knocking on the door and screaming, "I want to know the accusation. What am I accused for?"

The guard came and said I will go and report what you say to the commandant. Then hours and hours go by and nothing happens. Nothing. Then I take my shoes and beat on the window where the bars don't go all the way to the top and break the glass to pieces.

My God! then the action! They take away my shoes and they put me in a cell where heavy netting is over the entire window

and they watch me all the time. I demand a piece of paper and pencil and I write a complaint that nobody makes the interrogation. I demand to be interrogated, to be put in a cell with other people, to be allowed to walk in the prison yard and to have something to read. No answer. No nothing.

Then one day there came a soldier. "Collect your things," he says.

We walk and walk a long way and then he puts me in a cell with seven woman. Two woman I know right well. It was the most comfortable cell I ever spent a night in. Bunk, bunk, bunk, bunk here and bunk, bunk, bunk, bunk there and every bunk had a kind of big mattress and its own blanket. And in the middle a table. My God, this was very comfortable! I was so pleased just to be with the human being. Some of the woman were sitting there already six months, four months, three months. I told them all I knew. It was very nice. They day passed very quick.

After two or three days I say, "Let's organize a tee-ater." There were two quite elderly woman and they were the audience and two woman were the orchestra. The rest of us were the cast. Of course, you understand, I was in the title role. We took everything from one bunk and that was the stage.

My God, what was the name of this operetta we performed? Oh, yes, *Rose Marie.* I took a sheet off the bed and put it around my seat—you know like Rita Hayworth do her mink coat once. The sheet was like a tail. Then I took a pillow case and wrap it around my hair like a turban. We call the operetta *Rose Marie,* but we combine everything. *Carmen, Il Traviata.* It was a complete potpourri. One woman was wonderful. She know all the operas.

We really had a time of life. I was all man, all woman. I was on stage every minute and my black tight pants were as dramatic as can be with the sheet flying out behind. It was really a very beautiful costume and I never had such a success in my life. It was like a real little tee-ater—the orchestra was so good

and the stage was big and gave me a real chance. We started the performance right after supper and we went on and on until it was about ten o'clock.

Then suddenly here stood the commandant and he say, "Stop it!" but I just bow and go on, and then he calls a soldier who drags me off the stage. Then a half-hour later the soldier came back and say, "Citizen Shevko, collect your things."

The girls say, "Nila, don't go."

So I say, "I'm not going anywhere. I'm perfectly satisfied where I am and I'm not going any place."

Then the officer came and say, "You are a prisoner and you'll have to obey the rules of the prison."

"I don't consider myself a prisoner," I answer, "and I do not intend to obey the rules."

"Then we'll have to take you by force," he say.

Then all seven woman say he would have to take them by force, too, and immediately he saw his future—to fight with eight woman, all screaming—and all the prison screaming too—so he left; but in a short time he came back and said he was going to take me for the interrogation.

I said, "I will go, but without my shoes and without my coat or any of my things."

He said, "Very well."

It was very foolish of me for the floor was terribly cold. When we walk I saw the door and beyond the door the black, dirty snow and I understand we are going out.

So here I am without shoes, without coat!

They brought me to the Butirki Prison, which is an old prison from the tsarist days and is divided into two parts—one part for the political prisoner and one for the criminal. This time I was in a real cell—a narrow room with a little window high as the size of woman. If I can jump I can reach the sill. I can even reach the bars and see the yard. Everthing built in—

a narrow bed, a table, a chair and that's all. And on the bed one pillow and one sheet, very rough.

The next morning my things were brought in—my coat and shoes and the rest of my things, and a few days later they brought in a very nice woman from Georgia. She was terribly frightened and quite young. She was really my age but I already feel like an old woman. Suddenly we both began to laugh for I was acting as if I was the hostess of the prison. I had received a *peredatcha.*

When I learn she is a very excellent chess player, we made the most beautiful set of chess out of bread. The black bread, you know, is very chewy and so we chewed it and molded it into kings and queens and horses. I deeply believe in *Robinson Crusoe* because the things you can invent when it is necessary. A very beautiful piece of art the chess set was, really. Then we took a sheet of newspaper and drew the board. Sometimes we would play all night until the sun would rise. Of course, she always beat me, but I was learning fast.

Then I decided to organize a radio station, for my cell is very centrally located for broadcasting. I can hear the people from all sides of the prison talking and can repeat in a big voice what they say. I arranged for the broadcast beforehand with the notes. I sent word through the woman I met in the bathroom and through the guards and everybody. It is unbelievable. For weeks and weeks I worked to organize the conversation. Five minutes I gave every cell and everybody know on such and such a hour he will broadcast.

Then on the day of the broadcast I took a towel and I tied the ends of the towel to the bars in the window and there I was comfortably sitting in my towel; and then I took a paper and rolled it into a cone and shout: "Come in, Cell Sixteen." And Cell Sixteen would come in.

I remember there were two sisters. One was in one corner of

the building and one in the other and they ask each other questions all the time about the little man with the mustache who often came to dinner. Finally I got bored and say, "I never met him."

Then there was this woman who said to the husband, who I know already was distressed: "They took all the books and they took the wardrobe," so I cried out, "To hell with the wardrobe!" Here she was in jail—can imagine, Willie?—and worrying about the material things.

At first a guard came and was reasoning. "Arrested Citizen," he said, "I beg you to stop," but when I would not, he went for an officer and they dragged me from the window. "Good-by, Comrades," I shouted. "The broadcast is broken."

They took me from my cell which was so conveniently located and put me in solitary. While I was in solitary, there was one woman in prison who was pregnant, and her husband was arrested, too, and two children were left at home. Every day she went into hysterics. She would start to scream. God, how she would scream! It was just awful to hear.

Her husband wrote a letter to the NKVD that if the wife is not let out immediately, he is going on a honger strike. It's a very interesting thing under Soviet law they can punish you by not giving you paper and pencil, but if you demand paper and pencil to write a petition they have to give it to you. So we in solitary decide to go on a honger strike too. On the second of April everyone at the same moment, when given breakfast, hand a petition to the guard.

First, we demand for the woman that she be let out of prison and be reunited with her children.

Second, that nobody in political prison be put in solitary.

Third, that all Oppositionists must be given newspapers and magazines.

Fourth, that all would get their walk in the fresh air.

So, at seven o'clock in the morning, each gave this one to

the guard and we went on a honger strike. Then in a little while a very big, important officer, who had heard already about my radio station, came to see me.

"Are you Shevko?" he ask.

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"I thought you were much older."

I answered nothing and then he said, "Your petition was received and it will be considered, but in the meantime I advise you most seriously to stop the strike. It will not lead to anything." Then he went away and for four days nobody came. We were only on water—a good diet. How you loose the weight!

They open the door in the mornings and put the food inside. It is better these days. They put butter on the porridge.

You would say, "I refuse to eat."

The guard would say, "It's not any of my business. I have to leave it here."

He would leave it there for twenty minutes. I'd try to concentrate not to smell the food. I would just sit there and not even look.

The first two days was hard, but after two days there was such a strange feeling—a lightness. You would look at things and they would make sound that reflect in the head. If you look at the table it would make a noise like in a symphony that has no melody.

After four days the same man came and say the strike is a foolish thing but everybody will be granted a walk and will not be put in solitary. We say we will not stop the strike until it is guaranteed the woman is free.

On the fifth day I was no longer alone. They brought a woman to my cell and they also said, "Be ready for a walk."

I just lay down on the bed and pay no attention. I am very

weak and don't want to do anything. The sixth day I feel the same.

Then on the seventh day in the morning the commandant came. The news of the Opposition strike was spread all over Moscow and the authorities were afraid of all kinds of resentment because the Opposition was starving to death. The commandant said that the NKVD had made a quick interrogation and that the woman was given a sentence to be united with her children and they were already sent into exile.

So we ended the strike, but the first time I ate I throw it out. Even the second time. Some of the men were real sick, but the woman recovered quite quickly. As you know, Willie, the woman can survive anything.

The window sill in my cell was wide. Shortly after the strike I began to put the bread from my ration on the sill for the pigeons that were inside the yard of the prison. They can fly up the wall and down, but they never fly outside. I move slowly step by step. At first I just put the bread on the sill, and then I give them from my hand. Finally the day comes that I carefully pull this one through the bars. I can still feel the heart of this handy pigeon beat like this. Already I had prepared a paper—after two months in prison you get paper and pencil whether you want to write a petition or not—with the words DOWN WITH STALIN very big and black so you really can see them. I had made the mash of the bread and spread it on the corners of the paper to make it heavy. So now I tied this paper to the two legs of the pigeon and eased it back through the bars.

Ah, I wish you could have seen it. It was flying in beautiful, wide circles. Around and around it went in front of the windows as if especially trained. Then suddenly I heard the people scream with delight, and then the pigeon put on all his strengths together and flew over the prison wall.

It was April by now and though I tried to use the psychology and pretend I wasn't in prison—I was laughing, playing, singing, running—in the afternoons when everything was quiet and out of the window I could see the spring was come, I get this terrific, powerful desire to run and break something. This was the time I was so sorry I was caught. I think I don't know what I will do if I catch this man who is responsible for putting me in prison.

And beneath everything I was worried about Karel. I began to think over everything and I knew now I wanted a simple family life. I also worried about my mother. I think how unthoughtful I was to my mother; how many things I didn't do that I should have done. Sitting all by myself in this prison cell, I wanted to smash something.

One thing I feel most strongly. I don't want my mother to know I'm in prison. So I wrote her a fooling letter and asked the guard to mail it for me; but one day I received this *peredatcha* and I understand immediately it was from her. It was so thoughtfully arranged with things like a peasant woman would think a person in jail would like: dry bread that she had cut and dried in the stove so that I can keep it a long time, soap, a piece of ham that will stay long and four hard-boiled eggs. She sent me the bread in a bag so I can hang it up so the rats will not eat it. She thought about these rats without horror—she was only thinking about how to protect the bread. I went with this bread into exile.

She sent two more packages on my letter day and I knew the mother was right there in Moscow. Many, many months later I learned that a friend had written her I was in prison, and she came to Moscow and came to the NKVD information office and begged and cried to speak to some chief. Then she came to this chief and she stood on her knees and tried to kiss his hand, because she thought it would help to see me. "I

am so old," she begged in the neat, peasant way, "and I want to see my daughter before I die," but he just pushed her and told the soldiers to take her away.

Then one day when they take me to the bathroom, I run down the hall and lift the slots on the outside of the cell doors. These slots can only be lifted from the outside so the guards can look in and see what the prisoners are doing—and I say. "Good morning!" "Good morning!" "Good morning!"

An officer saw me and he ordered the guard to stop me, but when the guard held me I just screamed with all my voice and all my lungs. Now as you know the nerves of the people in prison are intense every minute, so when they heard the screams they thought the guards hurt me and they got nervous and beat on the doors and screamed, too, with all their voices and all their lungs. Then five soldiers were fighting with me and dragging me away. They dragged me over the cement and my black tights were in holes and all the skin was scratched and the blood was running in full streams.

It was early in the morning in early spring—it was still April —and quite cold. They dragged me to a punishment cell in a tower that was called the Tower of Pugachov for a man which was so great he conquered a large part of Russia. He led a peasant rebellion in the time of Catherine the Great. When he was captured he was brought and put in this tower, tortured and executed.

The stairs were crawling like a corkscrew inside. The room was round and dark, and on the walls were these iron things to torture people. I went crazy. Of course, that's it, I thought. I will be tortured and killed here. I was so frightened I can't tell you. These black things, these hooks, this dark!

I screamed. I pounded on the door. The window was long like this and so narrow. I screamed and pounded on the door until I was completely exhausted and then I lay face down. I was terrified.

The dinner time came and nobody comes. I knock on the door and I call and still nobody comes. Such a stillness and silence you can almost chew this stillness and silence. Not a sound from outside; not a sound from inside. No sounds whatsoever.

The supper time came and nobody comes.

By this time I need to go to relieve myself. I had no choice, I need to go and I had to do it in this corner. I was like an animal, but I had no choice. There was nothing. Nothing! I took my underwear and cover it.

Dostoyevsky once said that the worst thing about the human being is that he can get used to absolutely anything. It's true. I know from experience.

From the whole punishment—they dragged me there, they left me there all day and all night with no food and no water—yet, from the whole punishment this was what hurt me worse—that I had do this thing right there.

Until the next morning nobody came. Then I heard steps on the stairs and the guard came and I told to the guard, "Why you left me here?" And he brought me paper and I clean everything and I wash myself and have breakfast.

The second day everything was transferred from the other side in a big piece of sackcloth. Everything except my chess, including mother's dried, black bread.

Then I was left completely alone for seven days. I was so shocked, nervously I was lying in the bed just staring at the walls, the torture things, the so narrow, long window, the locks. The locks there the Americans would just die to have in their houses. They were so antique. Each lock was almost as big as a notebook.

They punished me more than they planned and I wrote a letter of protest. I wrote to the chief NKVD man. I never wrote to the chief of prison because I didn't consider myself

a prisoner. I demanded books and newspapers and walks and not to be alone.

On the seventh day about eleven o'clock I can hear somebody walking up the steps and a soldier came in and said, "Be ready for walk." I was very happy—it was a nice, sunny day—but he brought me to walk in a small yard where the windows of the criminals looked out and the men showed themselves to me. They were criminals who had been sitting for years without woman. It was the most horrible thing! I ran to the corner of the yard and just stood in the corner with my face to the wall.

The next time they came and said, "Be ready for walk," I refused. However, they sent me books and I read everything from beginning to end. I read Victor Hugo, de Maupassant, Tolstoy, everything.

About the ninth or tenth day I was sleeping at night and I heard terrific screams by man. I ran to the door. I understood he went through what I did and I lay on the floor and bang on the door so he would not feel so alone. Finally he quiet down.

In time I became very good friend with my guard. There was one guard downstairs and one upstairs and my friend was the guard which was up. He was such a nice, nice boy named Peter, not very attractive, but attractive enough. He used to open the door and then he would sit on a bench just outside the door and I would sit in my cell and he would tell me his life in his village. He was just a simple soldier, serving his years in the army.

"Can you sing?" he asked me one night.

"Not very well," I answered.

He said, "In village we used to sing but nobody sings in Moscow." So I would sing this very old Russian song and the tears would run in his eyes and the tears would run in mine. He missed his village and I missed Karel.

My relation with this Peter was so friendly, so pleasant. No,

he never made love to me. Nor did any guards. Were they so pure in their thoughts, you think? Of course, if they would come and make love, they will be shot.

There were seven cells in this tower and the tower fill and fill with the Opposition. In some cells there were two and three man.

"No more reservations taken," we would say. "All rooms filled."

In one of the cells was an engineer. I think he build the bridges. He was young and very brilliant. He took one piece of iron from the bed and he unhook the lock and then in the evenings he would go around and open all the cells and we would come out and sit on floor of these turning stairs. We told the guards if they report on us we will swear that they open the cells, and so we made an agreement that in case somebody come the guard will knock on the rail down-stairs and we will go quickly back into our cells and lock the doors. It only happened once somebody come; the tower was such an oblivion place.

At first we talk and we tell the stories and the jokes and we sing and recite the poetry. It was such a unity; such a collect because we had no freedom. We were there sitting from supper until bedtime, but we were free with our bedtime and sometimes sat up until almost morning.

Then we organized the university. The engineer talked on engineering and then there was a history professor from the Moscow University and somebody else, well educated, who gave us a whole series of lectures on Russian literature. Then we had political discussions.

Ah, I enjoy this university life so much I almost feel I belong there.

8

With the Criminals Is the Place

SEVERAL MONTHS I was in the tower and then one day the guard came and said, "Citizen, be ready with your things."

"Where are you taking me?" I said, but he made no answer.

So I was walking with my things and I came by the entrance to the prison. The big gate is open to the street and I saw people walking there and saw the life was going on. Suddenly this woman, who was not far, made the sign of the cross at me. I wanted to greet her, to talk to someone in the free world, but the guard hurried me on and took me to a cell in another building.

I wrote ten letters demanding why I am here. Then somehow the rumor spread there was going to be a big shipment—no, it is not correct to say shipment about the prisoner—a big sending of prisoners to exile and I know at once that's why they have brought me here. And I was glad. Anything but so it's different. All you want in a prison is something change.

After supper the door was open and a soldier said, "Be ready with your things," and they brought me to the office building and suddenly I was in a room with 200 or 250 woman. "Nila!" "Nila!" the woman shout and I see there are friends here. We

kiss! We hug! We laugh! We weep! My God, what excitement there was!

Then an officer came and said, "Citizen Shevko," and I was told to step into another room. There was an officer sitting at the desk and he pronounced my sentence, "Nila Shevko, wife of a traitor to the Soviet state, to exile for five years," without mentioning the place and without even mentioning I did something.

They gave to me this small piece of paper. My God, I was disgusted at the smallness of this piece of paper sending me to exile. All the woman got these papers, some for three years, some for five, some for six.

Then about an hour later the guards came and said, "Move on," and this time we came outside into the fresh air. Standing in line were five crows, just like at a reception. They come as close to the door as possible and we were packed just like little fish.

We start to move. I am pressed close to this window in the truck and I saw the people walking in the street; and in a doorway, the boy kiss the girl; and the nice, bright lights and the grand tee-ater, I saw all my beloved Moscow.

The woman pressed by me and behind me started to cry and I said, "Let us sing," and we began to sing "The Marseillaise," and the people in the streets stood like paralyzed and stared at the crow car coming, with the woman singing the revolutionary song. We know they will go home and talk about this—that the Opposition woman were being taken to the exile.

A very long train was there on the track in the suburb and they packed us in one car after another. It was the biggest shipment I suppose they ever had, for many crows came with men, too. Each car was built the same—the same hard benches, and on each bench one blanket, and bars at the windows. At each end of the car a guard.

Early in the morning we started to move. Summer was in

full swing while we were on the way. It took us more than two weeks for our train would stand for hours and hours on side tracks, waiting until other trains went by.

Every morning they gave us a ration of bread for the whole day—about two pounds, which was enough bread—and once a day at special stations they gave us some kind of porridge like oatmeal, but different, and once a day, hot soup.

We arrived at Sverdlovsk and there again were the black crows—not as big and beautiful as the black crows in Moscow but, nevertheless, black crows. They didn't take all of us from the train—just two crows full; the others proceeded. There were three woman and the rest was man and among this woman was an Old Bolshevik. I suppose there were about seventy of us altogether.

When we arrived at the prison they took us into a big, absolutely bare room with two benches and here we all spent the night. We know very well there is no cells for the political prisoners in Sverdlovsk, so next morning when the officer came the Old Bolshevik said, "We want to be sure our woman will not be put in cells with criminals."

"All right," said the officer. "Your demand will be satisfied."

So we plan that one will go and when she writes a note saying she is not in cell with criminals, the other will go. First the Old Bolshevik went and she sent back the note and then the second one went and then I went.

They took me down a long, long corridor and as I walked along I saw a person coming and one of the guards said, "Turn to the wall." They always said this in all the Russian prisons when you met a person coming. So I start to turn to the wall, but very slowly for I was terribly tired, and by this time I saw it was my husband, and I screamed, "Karel." Before the guards could do anything I run and we put our arms around each other in the strongest embrace. It was as strong as life. I thought I didn't breathe; only my heart beat, beat, beat. The

embrace was not only for love; it was for everything. His hair was quite graying, and he was young, don't forget. We didn't say one word. We just kiss and cry. It took the two guards with me and the one with him to tear us apart.

Then they took me to another building and here, in a very narrow cell with two long benches on each side, were at least sixty woman. In the middle there was a long table and at the end of it, a small table. At the small table sat the most beautiful woman I ever saw in my life. She had heavenly golden hair that was turned around her head like a crown, and beautiful eyes.

She looked at me with those beautiful eyes and she said, "Political?"

For the first time I was in prison I said, "Leave me alone." Then I told her what had happened to me just now.

She turned to a woman and said, "Get up and give her the place."

I was impressed that this woman got up and immediately I understood this golden-haired one was the head of the cell.

I took the woman's place and lay down and cover myself and lay there for two or three hours. In the afternoon, the golden-haired one said, "Can you work?"

By now I have learned she is the famous bandit, Moura. She was quite notorious, for she would rob the bank and destroy some of the Soviet economy. Her father was a Russian and her mother, a Gypsy.

Now when she asked "Can you work?" quick thoughts were running in my head. As a political prisoner, I have the right by prison law not to work, but I thought what position I would put myself in with this bandit and all these woman if I refuse to work. I don't know how long I will have to live with them. Two years, maybe. Three years, maybe. Another thing I needed to do something for the balance.

"Yes," I answered. "Of course I can work."

She said, "Wash the floor."

I turned up my sleeves and went around and nicely washed all the floor. Because of so many people the floor had to be washed twice a day.

The criminals were all kind of thieves, prostitutes, murderers. They were just the pure criminals; they had nothing to do with the political situation.

I had paper and pencil and I could write that I'm with the criminals and petition to be moved, but I quickly calculated I prefer to be with them. It was a strenuous life with political prisoners. They argue all the time and they all the time organize some kind of movement. I get dead tired of it. I was thinking if I am put in the cell with this Old Bolshevik woman she would talk all the time how pure a Leninist she is; how wonderful is the Revolution and I am fed of it. I enjoy the criminals. That's the place to be if you have to be in the prison. I saw its new material. The life was moving. The time passes very quickly.

Such characters. One day I saw the Gypsy woman was reading something.

"What are you reading?" I ask.

"Karl Marx."

She had about ten books—all political. Lenin, Stalin—all political books of Communist party. She was an anarchist. She hate this Communist party, but she explain, "If you fight against somebody, you must know what they stand for."

Then there was quite an old lady. She was so clean, so tidy. She had the white woolen stockings, clean as can be. A black blouse with all little pleats, standing like this up, and she has white hair with the little bun. Somehow she radiates this cleanliness, this quietness about her. She was like an icon in the cell.

Everybody call her Grandmother and I ask her, "Grandmother, tell me stories," and she went on and on telling me all kinds of beautiful stories—every one deeply religious, all about

angels, God, Jesus. She tell these stories with the most even voice, on and on. She never repeat herself. Always the big crowd sitting there, listening, and she, in the metal spectacles, look over them and talk. She was so clean inside, the dirt did not stick on her.

What she doing here among these criminal, I am thinking. Why she here and talk so religious; but nobody ever talk about her crime; and so one day I tell her, "Grandmother, it's not curiosity. I'm really interested. Why you are here?"

She said, "I'm here for life."

"But why?" I said.

"Oh, my child! I kill my husband and my daughter."

"But why?"

"To save his soul." Then she told me this story. One day she was working in the field and there was her husband sleeping with their daughter. It was such a crime, she took an ax and chopped off his head and the daughter's head, too.

To save his soul she was serving a life term for murder. Already she was there for years and years, and because of her beautiful behavior, she was paroled; but she refused, for she is going to die in prison and from her suffering she will save his soul from this terrible thing. Isn't it something? It's very Russian. If she will go and enjoy the life—enjoy the freedom and enjoy the birds—she was afraid she would not save his soul. In the night if I was up I would hear her praying—whispering, whispering.

It was a long time before she could be persuaded even to go for a walk in the prison yard. Every day, you see, the criminals take a walk, and she refused, for it was a pleasure. So the authorities ask her to go for walk, not for her pleasure, but to keep the peace with the criminals.

Our cell, because of this Gypsy woman and this old woman, was most privileged. We had no lesbianism in our cell. In all other cells it was quite open; nobody paid any attention to it;

and I know from stories from other cells the most horrible things happened, so I was lucky that Moura made it very clear there was to be no love in our cell. Any time she would notice two woman lie together in a bunk she would throw them out.

But of course many of the woman was almost crazy for some kind of sex sensation. There was one woman in prison with a baby—in those days many peasant women in Russia feed the babies from the breast until they are five years old. They come, the woman give them the breast, they pup-pup-pup and then run away. There was this mother who was a criminal in another cell and when our door was open she would come to the door with the baby and the woman in our cell would say, "I'll give you five rubles to let the baby suck at my breast." And this mother would pass the baby from woman to woman to suck frantically at these dry things.

What saved me these months was the reciting of the poetry. These murderers, these criminals, these prostitutes—the bottom of the life—they sit in their places on the benches and I sit at the table and for hours and hours I recite Pushkin, Lermontov, and Blok. I go on and on and on. There was one poem about the husband who find out his wife not faithful and lock her in her room and she died there. When the lover came back he found on the bed just the skeleton—all the flesh was eaten away—and only her hair was covering her skeleton. I wish you could hear the weeping when I come to the point of the hair. All these murderers would weep and I would forget who was my audience and feel with them only the tragedy and the beauty of the poetry, and I would weep, too. This was the most beloved poem.

Finally I think the whole cell already know all my poetry by heart and I send a request to the library for other books and, though they loved better to listen to the poetry, I read them all kind of books, even *War and Peace.* I skipped all the military descriptions because I didn't think I could hold their at-

tention; but I read all the rest of it to them. They didn't even want to go for a walk; they just want to hear me read. I offer many times for Moura to read, but she refuse. I was sure she was afraid if the criminals learn she was not so strong in reading, she would loose some of her power and, anyway, I have a very big voice; it is going all places.

We played cards, too; we had every kind of cards, though it was against the prison rules. Once a week everybody will be asked to leave the cell with all their things behind them, and they will search for knives and all things criminal and also for any kinds of cards or with what else you can gamble. If they find these things they will take them away.

But the same night when they search and take everything away, we play cards. It wasn't etiquette to ask where the cards come from. They would just be put on the table and we play. We play twenty-one mostly. No poker. The guards, they know the gamble is going on, but they do nothing. My good playing in canasta and Bolivia had the roots right there in Cell Twenty-seven. We gamble not for money, but for shoes and clothes. And you pay your debts! Sometime the woman is almost naked; she has nothing left to go for the walk. Sometime I saw a woman lying under a blanket just as she was born.

And such cheating! They can take your spectacles and you'll never know it. They sometime would show me the card tricks and I would try them, but I was quite clumsy. Everytime they caught me red-handed. I suppose they had the talent by nature.

One day I ask Moura, "Do you know how to read the cards?" And I find she believes in it deeply. So she taught me how to put the cards in combinations of three and the meaning of all the cards. The procedure is for the fortunetellers to ask first, "What do you want?" Then she opens three cards and, from the order and the meaning of the cards, she gives the answer. Then she asks, "What's on your heart?" Then, "What's going to happen to you?" For instance, all sixes are roads and mean

you will travel. All spades are trouble. The ace of spades is sickness; the ace of clubs is moving; the ace of hearts, love; the ace of diamonds, a letter.

I got so well at it that I got requests to tell the fortunes during all the walks. I learned to talk with the mysterious intonation and I was so concentrated on the cards I was very popular. They call me the political fortuneteller or the counterrevolutionary fortuneteller.

Back, though, for a moment, to the cheating. The criminals not only steal at cards, but they steal the personal things from each other. I have with me this beautiful necklace from Constantinople. One day I took it out and put it on and everybody admired it. Then I lay down for a short nap and during the nap it was gone. It was clear to me I must not complain to the guards it was gone—that would be very bad—so I said loudly, "My necklace was the one beautiful thing I ever had in all my life and now it is gone."

Moura just look in everybody's face and say, "It must be back by midnight."

Then a woman say, "I have to go out." I should have explained sooner that here we have much more freedom. The woman can knock on door and go to the bathroom whenever she feels like it. So this woman just got up, knock on door, and go out. I went on to sleep and while I was lying there, without my seeing, the necklace was put under my pillow. I heard later it came from the fartherest cell. It had been smuggled by the woman to this far away corridor.

But the most beloved occupation of the woman was going *ip, ip, ip,* killing these little things, crawling. By the hour they were going through the hair.

By now, of course, all the criminal prisoners know about my husband, and one morning a woman said, "Write a note. We have a way to send a letter to your husband." So I send three and four letters every day, and for two and a half months every

morning there was a letter from Karel brought with breakfast. Two men criminals brought all the food in a huge dirty iron kettle. The bread was in a basket. Moura saw that everyone got an equal share. It was the most touching care I ever got in my life. One criminal worked like mad arranging these letters. He killed the whole family, and yet went absolutely sentimental over Karel and me. Really, the whole prison sympathize that we are so near each other and yet cannot see each other. When our cell would go for a walk in the yard, a guard would whisper to me, "I saw your husband today and he is feeling fine."

Then one day I got a note from Karel saying the guards want to organize a meeting for us and I must trust a guard if he tells me I will be taken to some place and go with him quietly, asking nothing. So, just as Karel wrote, a guard came to my cell and pretend he has the serious order and say, "Arrested Shevko, follow me."

He brought me to these stairs and, sitting on the step, Karel and I had about six minutes together. His guard watch at the head of the step and my guard at the foot. We kiss and cry and laugh and everything and when the time is up the guard say, "I'm so terribly sorry, but you have to go now."

After that we do not try to organize another meeting to sacrifice our guards, but I wrote a petition to the authorities very calmly and ask to see my husband and the petition was granted for me to see him for ten minutes with two officers.

After quite a long time at Sverdlovsk, I learned the authorities are preparing to transfer prisoners and it struck me in the head. I was so deeply involved in my life in Cell Twenty-seven I had forgotten about the possibility of a transfer; but the same day I learn this I was called to the office of the commandant of the prison, who told me because of my bad behavior in Butirki Prison in Moscow I was to be sent to Tabory.

My God! I never heard about Tabory! Then I understand it is very, very far in the north. Indeed, I sincerely believe

it is the most far north place one can go. It is near the Arctic Circle and if you go straight to the Pole, so they say, there is no more villages.

That evening when everybody was in bed, the guards called my name and everybody waked up. I put my things together and the Grandmother crossed me many times and Moura even kissed me, and then I was gone.

9

Siberia—But Did I Enjoy It!

THEY BROUGHT ME in a black crow to the station. There was a big train there and we went to the very last town on the railroad. Then I came with my bundle to a place where 125 people were—all man. They put my bundle on a horse; then they put me in a row and we started to walk.

We walked week after week—nobody counted the time. Me, the only woman, and 125 man.

By this time it was already winter and snow was on the ground. They gave each of us a *polushubok*, which is a knee-length, very cheap coat of sheepskin, and a hat with this artificial fur, which was very popular in Russia, and heavy boots. Once more I was grateful to God that I had such big feet. The boots were big on even me, but not too big. There was one little man—a kind of intellectual professor—poor soul, how he suffered with these blisters. And they gave us all this free of charge! And besides, thirty rubles a month!

The first day we didn't go far, for nobody was accustomed to long walking, but after that we walked between fifteen and twenty kilometers—that is about nine to twelve miles—a day,

maybe more, except when there was a blizzard or some other very good reason. I didn't mind at all. After sitting months and months in prison, here I was walking in the beautiful cold, fresh air. Twenty kilometers was nothing to me. People think I was a hero because I walked to this most north place in Siberia, but, my God, did I enjoy it!

We would walk only during the day and then we would stop in big barracks behind the wire and spend the night.

At last all the people, except five of us, who were assigned to Tabory, were left in the various villages to which they were exiled; but here we were—four man and one woman, walking, walking. By now it is very cold, but it is a dry snow and when you walk it is not cold. Everything was so beautiful. Beautiful white snow, beautiful, huge pine trees, beautiful evergreens. The sky was so clear and blue. Believe me, it was such beautiful weather—so still, so quiet, you forget there is a dirty prison with dirty faces and dirty smell and dirty stories.

We walk along, swinging wide our arms, breathing deeply and beating our chests. Every day I'm trying to find something I don't like; but the only thing that worries me is the fate of Karel. In all other respects I must tell you it was as enjoyable as can be.

The food is plentiful now that there were only five of us. When we arrived to the small villages, where we will be staying the night, the guard assigned us to houses of the peasants. God! such big bowls of soup and huge pieces of meat; and cottage cheese made from the whole milk and big bowls of sour cream. In a pottery bowl they will put milk in a quite hot stove and it will be cooked to a light brown color with the brown skin on top. . . . It is dee-licious! Russians who will read about it now will remember and their mouths will water. And then home-made bread, big loaves, and dried fish. Dee-licious! I really felt ashamed to remember how free people in Moscow eat and I, a prisoner, eating this food.

So, after many weeks of walking we came to this Tabory in the early afternoon. There were twenty-four houses in the village, a mail house and the NKVD office with one NKVD officer. This officer made something wrong so he was banished to Tabory, but he was still in NKVD.

When we came to the NKVD office, here was this officer sitting in his underwear, his feet in hot water, all perspiring with a bottle of vodka. He was the most unrepresentative authority I ever saw in my life. The guard gave him the envelopes with our names and sentences and then he said, "You may go free about the village, but if you will be caught beyond the line of two kilometers you will be punished." It was like a circle in which you walk around and around, and never go out. Every evening you have to report to NKVD man, "Here I am. We have not run away."

The first time I walk on the street with no guard behind me, it was a sensational feeling. I walk up and down, up and down, tasting the freedom, and quite a young boy run up to me and say, "Are you one of us?"

"And who you are?" I say.

"I'm one of the Oppositionists."

So he brought me to this house in the village and all the Oppositionists—there were nineteen of us—came and they brought vodka and cook dinner and we make toasts. "Down with Stalin!" we say. And why not? We can't go farther.

Altogether there were about sixty exile people in Tabory. Besides the Oppositionists there was a big group of Zionists, and some anarchists and Mensheviks. There was only three woman in all of the Opposition and one of these got sick and was sent away, so I shared a tiny, tiny room with this left woman. The NKVD took the room from a peasant family.

This woman I roomed with was as dry as dry grass—just like a real politician. She never talk; she's so involved in the politics she just make the speeches. She opens her eyes in the morning

and say, "Lenin say on such and such a page . . ." And I don't care what Lenin say. Every morning, "Lenin say on such and such a page . . ." My God! She don't care about clothes, or anything, except Lenin.

After I had been a little while there all the Oppositionists except three, who were bookworms, asked the NKVD officer to let us work with the peasants. There was all kind of work and we needed the money, for the authorities now only gave us six rubles a month and we were always spending everything. I was working with the family with whom I live and I did it nicely. In the winter we were making thread from the wool. Here is a big puff of wool and we unwind it and make this homemade thread and wove the jacket. In the spring we were also preparing the manure—that was unpleasant work—for the field.

Then we go to the forest and chop the wood and I like this very, very much. Another girl and I went together and when we go there, we just lay down and watch the trees all covered with snow and shining like millions of diamonds. And such a quietness! That was the beautiful pleasure of life there, for we come so close to the nature.

Then after the enjoyment of the beauty and the quietness, we chop the wood and pile it for the sleds and then when the sleds come we are running behind them, loading them with the wood. Then at noon we bring to the man who is working their dinner and we sit by the fires and smell the fresh-cut, sawed wood and eat the food that has been prepared. I really felt happy. Oh, the beautiful struggle with nature! There is nothing brings you such a satisfaction and such a stillness in your soul.

The winters are very long here in the Arctic Circle; the summers very short and hot; and the land is very rich. Such an amount of berries. It's the country of berries. Also cabbage grows there beautifully and cucumbers. They pickle the cu-

cumbers in huge barrels and then they put them in caves and nature will cover them with snow and keep them perfectly.

It was so cold in winter, the most fancy dessert was to pour vodka in little forms like cubes in the icebox and freeze it and then take it and suck it. It is dee-licious and quite effective.

And now you see man will go for hunt and they will kill the bears and the woman will stay at home and chop onions in a big, wooden thing. Then the man bring home the bears—two or three, if lucky—and they take the skin off and make covers for the sleigh; from the better pieces the woman make the *pelmeni.* We cut the pieces very small and mix it with the onions and peppers and roll it up in thin dough and put them on big sheets and put them outside to freeze them. The Siberia outside is better than the deep freeze. Then we put them in bags especially sewn for that purpose and hang them in a cold hall that you come to before you come to the house. We boil them in water and eat them with a sauce made with pepper and mustard. In the morning we sometime eat them without sauce.

Then the men go for the bird-hunting. They take an empty wagon and in three days bring back a wagon full of birds—the nature is so rich there and not so many people hunting as in Kentucky. The wild ducks are especially flying. When they shoot, five or six will fall down. The most dee-licious ducks—so tender you can cut them with a fork.

The fishing is even more rich. When the water is more or less still on this river there that is going as north as possible, we take a piece of string—we never bother about worms or bait or anything, just little pieces of cloth on the hooks—and z-zh-ip, z-zh-ip, nice, big fish like that. There are so much fish there, fishing is really too easy. There is not this pleasure when you can think of your past and your future, for there is no time.

In winter it is even easier. You take a piece of iron and crawl out on the ice and crack a hole and the fish just come there like

that and you pick them up. This fishing doesn't require any intelligence, no equipment and no patience.

The best job I ever had there was late in the summer when the grass was ready to cut. The village was on this side of the river, and on the other side was the big fields on which the villagers gather their hay. The river is at least a half-mile wide there, maybe more. On old Russian maps is this river, which means it is a big one. My job was to bring the man across the river. The boat was made from a huge tree and I had one oar on back and I go very fast for the stream was very fast. I learned to bring the man—there were six from one family—right to the field, and then I would bring them dinner, and then in the evening I would bring them back to the village.

Up to this day not one man said, "Let me do it." They respect my work. I was paid for this, so they let me do it. And I really enjoyed it.

But what the people of Tabory liked best was the harvest celebration. At a harvest celebration people come from sixty miles around and when our village moved for one, the only people left in the village were the exiles. But once all the villagers came for the celebration to *our* village and I got to go and oh! I had the most beautiful time. I always dance with such oblivion, but that night I overdanced. I really swept the floor. Gypsying and everything.

There was a young man there from the next village and he was a wonderful dancer too. He danced this Russian style, kicking out your feet, and he was so light and so graceful. He asked me to be his partner and everything went very fine.

But the Opposition thought it was not dignifying that I forget I was in exile and go mixing with everybody and dancing and so on. So I say, "Are you fighting to make the life more beautiful for these people than Stalin will give them?" Honestly I didn't understand it. It seemed to me they were just the same as hypocrites, saying don't mix with these people.

About two weeks after this celebration, a carriage with the nice rug, with a man with the towel tied like an ambassador's ribbon right across his chest, and a woman stop in front of our place. The woman of the house cry, "My God, I have not one daughter to be married." You see there is an old Russian custom when you want to marry somebody you send ahead a man and woman to negotiate. We call them in Russia *svat.*

So they came in and it's not polite in Russia to say "What you come for?" so the lady of the house put food on the table and was the hostess.

Finally, though, they said what they had come for and then the woman of the house came where I was with a handkerchief over her head and a handkerchief over her mouth—you know when you smile in Russia you're supposed to cover the teeth—and she say, "It's for you." And my God, it was my hand the man was asking!

Well, I was in seventh heaven at this adventure. I went in and touched their hands and sat down and they say what will be my intention.

I say, "Thank you. I'm honored, but I'm in exile."

It is the dancing partner, of course, who wants me in marriage and he knows, they say, that I'm in exile, but he still will take me. Then I say, "I am married and my husband is in prison." So, sadly, the negotiations ended.

When I went to the next dance the young man avoided me, but I went up to him and thank him for the honor he did me and I ask him to dance. It is the most unpermitted and the most impolite thing that a woman ask a man to dance but I did it, Willie. I learn early.

Another great pleasure in Tabory was the arrival of the mail. There was no telephone and no telegraph and the mail would come only once a week—on a Wednesday. On that day everybody desired to put on everything clean. Everybody washed himself and put on the very best that he has. The day had the

feeling of Easter or Christmas. All the faces of the exiled people will be strained to hear the bells because the mail, you see, will come with three horses and the middle horse has bells. On a still winter day you can hear the approach of the mail for miles and miles away, and the faces begin to change. "The mail is coming!" everybody cries. "The mail is coming!" And you see people running—and I mean running—to the post office.

Sometimes you sit for forty-five minutes after the first hearing of the bells, waiting. You don't know what you expect, good or bad. Letters, books, parcels, anything might come, and we are so united everything will be read aloud, except the most personal things. Even now, can imagine every time I hear bells ring, immediately is the feeling of mail in Tabory.

Speaking of these books, when we were already in Tabory month after month, we Oppositionists decide to organize a school. Everybody must go and defend his subject. Friends would send the books and we had a very good and selected library. I was working in the daytime and studying at night.

Then I wanted to learn a foreign language—always I wanted to learn foreign languages—but from all the exile people nobody knew enough foreign language to teach it, except Hebrew. Many Zionists were there, as I told you, and there was one who was quite well known—I even remember his name, Ashkinazi. So I came to him and ask to learn Hebrew. It doesn't surprise him somehow and every day I would take the conversation and the writing. This writing from right to left fascinated me. I would learn it like they do in school, and soon I began to speak with such a heavy accent and with such a gesture. When I learned enough words, I decided to keep my diary in Hebrew—my most secret thoughts. If the Opposition would read it they would be very much surprised.

It was about now that we hear for the first time Stalin started to organize the collective farms. In our village the NKVD man got the order to call the meeting and to register the people.

We of the Opposition had no right to go to the meeting because we were prisoners, but my family came back and told me about these collective farms. Nobody could understand how this could be. The government will give seeds and the machinery, they understand, but the rest was not one little bit clear. The Opposition was as excited as the villagers.

Then something happened that was a very big turning point in my life. A very beloved time for me in Tabory was to go to the woods with this big dog like a Russian wolf that the peasants I live with have. As I think I already told you, the woods here are really woods. It's heavy as one can imagine. They're thousands and thousands of years old. So I was accustomed to clear a little place around in these heavy woods and make myself a little tee-ater. You will never know the plays I put on on that stage. I make costumes from big leaves and bushes and I would act on and on. The dog would sit there, my only audience.

One day I was acting a very sad Russian poem about a girl who was made of snow and so never could fall in love, for love is such a strong power, she would melt. With such a tragedy I cried out:

> My dear own Mother,
> In tears of pain and sorrow
> Your abandoned daughter is calling to you.
> Oh! Mother dear,
> Everyone around me loves,
> But I alone dare not love.

Then I fell down and suddenly a voice say, "Bravo! Bravo!" and there is clapping and here comes the young man with golden hair, and just like in movie, the dog jump at him.

"Who you are?" I ask.

"Oh, you perform so beautifully," he say.

"But who you are?"

He says he is an anarchist who arrived this morning to our exile. He was quite young, but already had spent many years in prison. We talk the life and then go back together to the village. And again the Opposition doesn't approve of my behavior. They frown on my friendship with this anarchist. "We are the real revolutionists," they say, "and we are 100 per cent against the anarchist movement. We will not permit you to meet with this man and we will not accept him as a friend." Sitting right there, they said this. It's so ridiculous, so funny really. Because his idea was against Lenin, Stalin, against everything—they will not have anything to do with him.

Of course, I don't agree. I was against any kind of tight. I do not want to be regulated. I want to talk, I want to create. I was for a real freedom of thought, of opinion, of art. I believe the people must stick to what they believe and then what they create will have individuality. No art can be great when it's under pressure.

I say to the Opposition, "O.K., you don't approve his ideas but that is no reason to be his enemy. Argue with him and he might join you."

They would not listen. Then I see if the Opposition will come to the power, they will be the same as Stalin. This was a very big turning point in my life. I find out I have to fight with them almost the same as I fight against Stalin and I became so fed, so tired of it I can't tell you.

Well, time passed. When I had been there a year and a half, the prices got so high because there were so many exiles, we got the idea to organize this expedition to go to another village which was about fifteen or twenty miles, to buy a big quantity of supplies for everybody. I and a quite elderly professor were assigned to this business. He was so old and weak I just the same as carried him on my shoulders. We got the permission from our drunkard to be absent thirty-six hours and out we went with a horse with a wagon.

The prices were already low even at the next village and so I said to the professor, "Let's go on to the next village and they may be even lower." So we went to the next village and it was a terrible storm. Oh, it looked like the whole sky was open and pouring down. Then, when the storm was passed, we bought so much we forgot all about the punishment if we are not back. It was terrific. I told fortunes for twelve eggs. I told fortunes for ham, pork and sausages. For the money we had from the Opposition we bought a whole pig—a big, fat one—and long, salted fat strips and as many pig legs as can be. You know you cook them and eat them cold with vinegar. They're dee-licious! We bought a lot of onions on strings and potatoes and garlic. We really piled the wagon high up.

When we got back to Tabory we were gone seventy-two hours instead of thirty-six, so we went to the NKVD man and told him there was a terrific storm and we lost one of the wheels on the wagon and all kinds of things happened. We told him we rush, rush, rush as fast as possible, for we didn't want to give him a chance to say we had done something bad; but already he had sent the report that two prisoners escape. He really wanted to produce some action so he would be moved from Tabory.

The report has to go hundreds of miles so in the meantime he locked us in a cold cellar, but then he understands he has to feed us and so he let us out.

Then the investigation committee came—and here we are. We explain again we were in a storm and everything, but it was given the order I'll be transferred. The old professor was not taken; I was taken alone.

My family gave me a farewell dinner. We got some vodka and we sit in the kitchen, as we usually did, and the woman cry, "Ou-ou-ou-ou, ou-ou-ou." In Russia at a funeral the more the people shout, the more they show they love the dead one. They shout, "Ou-ou-ou, ou-ou-ou"—it's really a wail—with quick

talking, "My dear one, why are you leaving us?" . . . "Where are you going, my dear one?" And I did the same with the same abundance.

Now I am transferred, but this time I didn't walk. I went with the man of the investigation committee in a droshky with three horses with the bells. I remember lying there in the back watching the road running with the bells. How I wish to settle down somewhere! I no longer have the desire to travel. Already I want to settle down, to belong to some place, not to be an outcomer. It was not deep roots at Tabory, but some kind of roots, and now I am being taken into a new place. I don't know what's in front; all is such an uncertainty. The bells are very sad as they accompany my very sad thoughts.

10

This Was the End for Karel and Me

MAYBE A WEEK, maybe a little bit more we were traveling with this droshky and these horses. We'd come to a place and change the horses, and then we'd go on and come to another place and change the horses, and in the evenings we'd stop at the peasant houses.

Then, finally, I came to this station and I was put in an ordinary train compartment with two guards and we arrived at Sverdlovsk, where they took me right back to the prison, but this time I wasn't put in the cell with the criminals.

When I came there, I heard about a new movement not to split the country with the Opposition. Rumors flew about in the air. The Opposition was urged to let the fight on Stalin be finished. The country must be united to be strong against outside enemies. It was almost positive, so went the rumors, that the decision will be to bow to Stalin.

Well, I stayed at Sverdlovsk for two or three weeks and again I was put in a compartment with two guards to go, this time, to Tyumen, in central Siberia. All day the two guards and I

played cards. All day, every day. When we would come to a station we would put the cards away, in case officers come, and we take a very quick walk. Then back to the cards.

The cards were such an old, such a heavy, such a greasy things I had the feeling we could fry them for pancakes. They were still from the tsarist days and were the most precious things. I know all the cards from my Gypsy touch. The outside was so full of defects I understand from these what each card can be. I still remember like it was yesterday that one corner of the king of diamonds was missing. We played for money and, as you can imagine, Willie, the guards never beat me.

At one large station was a family of peasants with the children. The little boy had on his bast shoes, called *lapti*, and his little coat was of homemade material. He came up to me and gave me this coin—a kopeck. It was very interesting for in old, old Russia there exists a belief that if you will give a kopeck to a prisoner something very good will happen to you. I said to the boy, "I hope you will be lucky," and I took it and kept it for quite a long time. I was hoping something good would happen to me, too.

When we arrived at Tyumen they took me to the NKVD office and they lock me in a room and I sit and sit. By this time I already learn how to be alone and not to break my nerve. When the door is locked, I just look around to find something to occupy my mind. I develop how to close my eyes and be completely involved in a game, talking with people. I would imagine I would come to Moscow and I'd go to the concert and I'd go to the tee-ater, being very great and very beautiful. I develop such a concentration that I can sit like this—and here I am.

Finally, I was called to the office and there was a very big and handsome man there and I saw he was an important man in NKVD.

He got up like only a Southern gentleman in Kentucky can and ask, "Would you like to sit down?"

It was the first time any NKVD man ever ask me that and I thought quickly, I'll be shot. The politeness comes only before the death. When they put me in this Pugachav Tower I was not so frightened. Perspiration was gathering on my temples.

I remember I sat just like this on the edge of the chair in front of the desk and he sat behind, happy with pencil.

"Would you like a cigarette?" he ask.

I almost drop dead. This was the end.

"I don't smoke," I say.

Then he put the cigarette gracefully in the month and light the match.

Then he call me "Nila Ivanovna," just like we were at a dinner party together. "Nila Ivanovna, I'm sure you've heard that the biggest Oppositionists have already come to the decision that the opposition is very dangerous for Russia, and that they have already come to Moscow. Would you like to join with them? All you have to do is to write you join these people and sign your name to this letter."

I say, "I have to think about this."

"But how long will it take you?" he ask.

I say I don't know, but I wouldn't like to come to so important a decision by myself.

"Haven't you the knowledge that your husband has already signed and he's on the way to Moscow?"

"No, I have not the knowledge," I answer, and then I ask him, "Am I free to go about the town?"

"You're absolutely free," he said, "and I will give you the name of the Oppositionists in the town and you can go and ask them."

The conversation was so social, so elegant! What shall I do, I think, if he offers me his hand to say good-by. Shall I shake hands with a member of NKVD, which has imprisoned me and treated me so bad?

But happily for me he didn't offer his hand; he just showed

me into the next office where a man gave me the names and addresses of three or four members of the Opposition. One was a woman I was in prison with in Moscow and I went immediately there. She said she had not signed the letter; she was waiting for the decision from Moscow.

She also said a big boat will arrive that day from Tobolsk with important Oppositionists who already signed the letter. A very famous and a very large prison was at Tobolsk for very important political prisoners. After the Revolution a lot of nobility and high hierarchy of clergyman were there, and now it was a prison for important Oppositionists.

We hurried to the place where the boat was already coming and we saw many men on board, gay as can be. They were waving, shouting and everything. Then they put the plank down, and suddenly I saw Karel approaching. He was in an old green soldier's coat, with a rucksack on his back, and his hair was quite graying. I was so shocked I was speechless, and he passed a few feet by me; and then I cried out and he turned and ran back and we were in each other's arms.

I took him to the apartment of the woman and he told me he was disappointed in the Opposition the same as I was disappointed. He now understood if the Opposition would come to power, there would be a change of words, but no basic change. No freedom. Different words, but no difference. And he had suffered enough for this lost cause. He had been in a death cell for eight and a half months without any trial, and then he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and was transferred under guard to Tobolsk, where he had been in solitary for many months.

He was supposed to go on to Moscow that very same night, but he went to the NKVD and ask that they postpone his going for three days, which they agreed to as politely as can be. The woman moved somewhere else and gave us her room.

I signed the letter while Karel was there, but I had to wait

until the paper went to Moscow and came back, which took about three weeks. Then I was gone! For the first time in many long months I was with no restrictions and just went.

Of course, we had no place to live in Moscow, but Karel had a friend, who was a very important Communist with a country place in a Moscow suburb, called Silverwoods—they live well, these Communists, don't you worry—and he loaned Karel this country place. He was living himself in his Moscow apartment. So when I came, I was there, too, but I wasn't satisfied to live there. I don't know how to explain it, but I resent this big, false place. I didn't feel I belong there.

Karel understood it, so I packed up my things, got on the bus and came to Moscow. Rather quickly I found a room and then Karel left the country and lived with me.

Already Karel had got a job in a publishing house in charge of English, French and German textbooks; but I felt I must be independent—I'll never be my own individual self until I am on my own—and I got a job with the Moscow Association of Co-operatives. I was put in charge of organizing courses for salesmen in co-operatives in the villages.

I took an old school and fixed it up nicely for dormitories and classrooms. I thought the salesman must be taught to be polite and so my idea was to make their surroundings beautiful, so they would be faster to learn these things. I made nice curtains and got rugs for the floors and I put flowers everywhere. Some big shot bureaucrat said, "To be a good salesman he doesn't need to live with the flowers in his room," but it was too late. Already I spent the money for these things.

I did understand this idea that you come into a room and see flowers and pretty curtains and rugs, you can study better. Never before did they have such well-behaved, such a well-organized group of students and never before did the chairman of the courses receive so many letters of appreciation from the students. They all write they like these flowers.

It was most enjoyable, this educational work. There was only one thing I was fighting. I felt it would be very good for the salesman if we include a poetry course in the curriculum; but the chairman said no. The courses must deal completely with the selling; only some politics must be included. For five years I was doing this and I was very happy and content.

Then there was a big change in Russia. In December 1934, Kirov, Stalin's right-hand man, was assassinated, and though it was rumored Kirov was killed by a young man because he was jealous of him for having an affair with his wife, Stalin chose this as an excuse to liquidate the Opposition to his regime. It is a trick as old as can be. What followed, you know. The great purge. Everybody who was ever opposed to Stalin was arrested and many who had nothing to do with the Opposition.

Karel and I were visiting my mother when the news came there was this greatest wave of arrests and Karel understood immediately what it meant. "That's the end for us," he said.

We went back to Moscow and our room was already searched. Our landlady was in complete hysterics. The NKVD hadn't asked for me, but they had asked for Karel. One strong thing against him was that almost all the Opposition who returned after the exile rejoined the Communist party, but he did not.

Then a week passed and nobody came. Then another week and nobody came. The only thing that happened bad was that when Karel reported for his work, he is told he is not working there any more. Then a week later I lost my job. Without any explanation, without anything, they just asked me to write I'd like to be relieved of my work.

Karel tried to find work, but, of course, he can't. And of course, we never had too much saving. Moscow is full of arrests. Every night we thought this one will be it. Really that was the worse. Both of us almost went crazy with the pressure.

Three weeks passed and nobody came. Finally, Karel said

he would call the NKVD and say if you're not arresting me, I will go somewhere and find a job. We feel the situation must be cleared because it was impossible to live like that. We went close to a nervous breakdown. The man he talked to on the telephone said he would like to see him, but what fooled us really and gave us some hope, he said Karel can come at eleven o'clock or at three o'clock.

"Must I bring my things with me?" Karel asked.

"Not necessary," he said.

Karel said, "I'll be there at three o'clock."

At this time they were showing in Moscow the French picture, *Sous les Toits de Paris*, so I said to Karel, "Let's go to the movies," for I thought it would make the time pass until three o'clock. The saddest time I ever had in my life was in that movie. We went through all the picture and then we walk to the NKVD. We walk and walk and walk. Karel went first into a small building and got his pass and then we walk until we came to a door that was closed. He stood there for a moment, took off his hat, put his hand to his mouth. Then he went inside and the door was closed.

I went right home for it is not permitted to stay on the street near the NKVD and I waited and waited and waited. Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock and no Karel and then I understand that he is arrested. When his letter-day came I went to the prison with the package and it was accepted.

This time was very different from the first arrest. This time everybody who was arrested was accused of having a part in murdering Comrade Kirov and we know it was serious business. Then another thing even more horrible: it was the first time friends were afraid, terribly afraid, and could not help. I was afraid even to walk on the street and meet friends, for I knew they would be embarrassed not to speak to me and yet, if they did, they might be arrested too. It was something unbelievable

how they arrested the people. It was awful. The fear was so great that the people didn't go places. There was a big silence these days like a heavy cloud hanging over all Moscow.

Those months I couldn't find a job even cleaning the streets like I did before; but there lived a man in our house who worked in a big grocery shop—a very big one—and he gave me a job in the basement sorting out damp, rotten apples. Only one other as unfortunate a creature as I was working there. I went on and on working there, eating only those thrown-away apples and black bread and scraps, for I was trying to bring Karel all he needed.

For three months he was in prison and though I applied for a meeting immediately after he was arrested, it was refused. Then one day I got a little card to bring the clothes. I picked up his coat and brought it there to the prison. And that was all. They didn't even give us a last meeting.

I learned he was being sent to Kolyma, where they dig for gold, to build a road. I got one postcard from him on the way and then two letters after he arrived, and then there was nothing and nothing and nothing at all for months and months.

Then, after eight months passed, I was walking on the street and a man walking behind me said very quietly, "Don't turn around. Just keep on walking and listen to what I'm going to tell you. I was in Kolyma and I saw your husband working there. It was very cold and he was wearing this thin, ragged coat and he got pneumonia and died. I myself saw him dead."

I believed him at once and like I was in hypnosis I kept walking and walking.

I finally heard officially that he was dead. I got a letter from NKVD informing me he had died from natural causes.

My brother Nikolai and his wife were also arrested during this great purge. As I already told you, Willie, he joined the Communist party when he was very young. He was bright, but not intelligent, and was very good with his hands. He can build

from scraps something that will look interesting. He never had any education, for he never even finished high school, but went to work in a small factory near Kursk as the lowest worker. Then in a few years he became manager. He really went climbing and climbing. He was moved to a bigger plant and then he was mayor of the town. After that he was transferred to Voronezh, a very important town, and became chairman of the whole district. Then he began going to Moscow for conferences. He was really a very big shot.

This climbing made him a real Soviet bureaucrat. He, like the other members of the party, get everything and, because the country is so poverty-stricken, this inside track to the good things keeps him and the others right in line. For instance, in the time when everybody will be in great need and there are very poor rations or no rations at all, the government, to keep these Soviet bureaucrats happy, will open closed shops to which they can come with the special pass and buy anything, and I mean anything—even from the capitalist country.

Once Stalin gathered like this important man—the tops of the tops—to a meeting, and he himself made a long speech how dangerous for Russia to look to capitalist countries. The influence of the West has become too strong, he said; it had become too strong in art, sports, clothes, everything. So everybody get up and applaud and pass a resolution—down with everything from the capitalist countries. Everybody holds up his arm to vote and every arm is 100 per cent in capitalist suit.

Naturally, these privileged people become very powerful class. They understand the moment they will not think the same, they will loose all they have. This makes it much harder for them to revolt than before the Revolution, because when the Revolution came they have nothing to loose and now, you see, they have already got a lot to loose.

These big bureaucrats have to act even more important than they feel. They would consider it undignifying for them to do

any kind of work, like working in the garden or carrying a package. Once I was visiting my mother in Voronezh and I saw my brother walking on the street a little ahead of his wife, who was very pregnant, and she was carrying a big, heavy bundle. and I ask, "Nikolai, how can you let her do it?"

He say, "Nila, you don't know how I suffer, but I'm too important to walk on the street with a bundle."

That is illustrating the bureaucratic party!

Then one day I read in the paper that the head of the Communist party of the whole area where my brother was governor, was arrested. Right away I said, "Here my brother go," for whenever the head of an area was arrested, everybody of any importance under him was arrested too.

Sure enough, he and his wife were arrested. My brother was given ten years' imprisonment at hard labor, which means in the coal mines, and my sister-in-law was given five years. I heard that the charge against my brother was that by force, that is by beating, he got the people to work on the collective farms. I do believe he pressed the matter, for he got the party line, but I certainly don't believe he beat the people.

He was flesh and blood Soviet. It never came to his mind to question why. He just followed the line. There are millions like him and it is because of them the Communist party is so strong. When he was arrested I only wanted to look in his soul and see if he is bewildered; but I was sure as he sat in jail he thought this must be right because the Communist party arrested him.

Also the husband of my sister Alexandra was arrested in this great purge. Did I tell you about my sister Alexandra when I talked about my childhood? Anyway, she was so uninteresting I don't know how Mother begat her. She had no imagination, no creation, no nothing, she was only interested in the measurements. When she made the bed, she measured to see that the blanket was the exact same inches at each corner, and when

she came in a room and saw a picture hanging a little bit crooked, she went crazy. She revolted me with such tidiness.

But she did have a very interesting shape. All her figure was just like a bottle. Her legs were like bottles and her body was like one, too. Whenever I was mad with her, which was almost all the time, I called her "Bottles."

Well, ugly as she was, when she finished school in Kursk she packed up her things and went to Leningrad to study to be an engineer in forestry. As you understand, the government would educate you free. While she was studying there she met my cousin, who looked very much like Cary Grant, except he was much more elegant and tall. Believe me, he was one of the most handsomest man I ever saw in my life. And, my God, this very man married my bottle-sister! I don't know why except for the balance.

He was an archaeologist and when he wrote his doctorate and got his degree, he was offered a chair in archaeology at the Institute in Leningrad. Really, he was one of the most brilliant archaeologists in the country; but when the purge moved into the intelligentsia class he was arrested. No reason at all was given for his arrest. However, by this time people were being arrested who can be potential enemies of Stalin. They don't have to be enemies, you understand; but because of their educational background, or friendships, or associations, or something, they *may* develop into enemies. He was never heard from again.

11

How to Be a Terrific Reporter in Moscow

ALTHOUGH ARRESTS were going on I was able to get a job on the newspaper, *Journal de Moscou.* I now, you see, was a widow of a prisoner, instead of the wife of one, and that made a very great difference. Still I was not officially on the payroll.

The *Journal de Moscou* had a circulation of about 75,000, and of that number only about 1,000 was in Moscow; all the other subscribers were in France and other countries. Everything in it was published to reflect the good life in the Soviet Union. Everything that was invented, that was painted, that was composed, will be blown up in this paper for the readers abroad.

Editorials and important articles, of course, had to be taken to the Foreign Office for the approval of Maxim Litvinov, who was then Foreign Commissar, and all the articles had to be passed on by the censor. The editor was so often arrested and taken out and replaced by another editor that the superintendent of the building finally made a plaque for the door on which

the name could be quickly changed without removing the whole plaque.

Besides living constantly in the shadow of the censor, we had in the paper a political circle that everybody must attend. In every plant, factory office, school and university, which has as many as five people on its rolls, there must be this political circle and every human being working there must go through it. The instructors are sent by the local Communist party. In this way they hold the minds of the workers.

Well, among the translators on the paper was a Russian count, Count Vladimir Golitzin, who also was obliged to study at this political circle. He was very thin and the poorest dressed man—in the rags, really—and yet everything about him was an elegance. Even in rags was the dignity. It just came with the blood, with the milk of his mother.

He was quite quiet; really never talked. The Soviet preserved him only because he could speak and write excellent French and they needed to have the paper look like it was originally written in the French language. Though he was present in the political circle, I always felt he was absent.

I remember one day the instructor suggested as a subject for discussion: "How the People Would Live When Socialism Completely Built." At every meeting there was a subject for discussion. I didn't think about it at the time, but now I know the instructor would ask the opinions of the people so he could run and report them. He asked everybody and they would say more or less accordingly to what they read in the book by Stalin, always trying very hard not to use their own imaginations. This day when practically everybody express their opinion, the instructor turn to Count Golitzin and ask, "What do you think, Comrade Golitzin?"

"What do I think?" he say. He take a long, deep breath and he look dreamy, his hands folded together beneath his chin as if in prayer, and his eyes closed, and he say, "When the social-

ism is built, there will be in every house, in every apartment, on every corner of the street, a faucet, and from this faucet will flow a wonderful dry champagne." Then he scratch lightly his chin and add, "Not sweet, but very dry. Somewhat like Cliquot." And he say "Cliquot" with such a French accent.

I tell you, we were just completely spellbound, imagining all these faucets and smelling everywhere the aroma of champagne. The Count express himself so vividly, we almost taste champagne over our tongues.

Then the instructor put himself together and say, "Comrade Golitzin, what a strange idea of socialism."

The Count just shrugged and that was the last time I ever heard him speak.

I was a terrific reporter. For example, when Henri Barbusse, the author of *Under Fire* and the biographies of Jesus and Stalin, died in Moscow and was to be buried in the walls of the Kremlin, the managing editor wanted a story of the funeral. As only the big papers like *Pravda* and *Izvestia* got the passes, he sent for me and said, "Nila, do you think you can do something for me? Do you think you can get inside the hall where Barbusse's body is lying?"

Of course I smell adventure at once, and I said, "I'll try."

So I came to this building where everybody of importance is lying and there are guards everywhere. Then I saw the orchestra people going in and I recognized the man playing the trombone. In one swoop I came to him and said, "Oh, please let's divide it. I'll take the box and you can take the instrument," and so we proceed quick, quick, just as solemn as can be, and I came to the balcony and sat right over the coffin for two hours, watching Stalin and all the dignitaries.

I wrote the most beautiful story. I made it just as dramatic as possible and then, very casually, I walked over and put it on the desk of the managing editor, and when he read it, he was so excited, he jumped up and kissed me.

Now, every paper in Russia will get after every edition an envelope from the chief editor of the Central Communist Committee and in this envelope will be a criticism, good or bad, of what was in the paper. If it is bad, the editor will z-zh-ip, z-zh-ip out the window and a new editor will come. This is how the Communists keep the general line.

After the edition with my story, I was sitting, waiting, when the managing editor stuck his head out of his door and said, "Will you come in, Nila?" I just crawl inside, but then I saw smiling faces and was told that in this envelope was praise for "a very well written story." I tell you, my standing on the paper got very strong after that.

Now one more example. In Moscow at this time was a very famous painter by the name of Mikhail Nesterov. He was famous in pre-Revolutionary times. Though he refused to recognize the Soviet Union, he was such a great man that Lenin gave the order not to touch him and always to see that he is given the highest rations and that his paints are delivered to him regularly.

For twenty years he had lived in a house just as before the Revolution. It was a lovely house with a beautiful garden—a piece of old Russia right in the middle of Moscow. He still didn't recognize the Soviets and he would never show his paintings; but he had no choice except to take the food.

Well, the managing editor learned that he was working on a portrait of Academician Ivan Pavlov, who was very distinguished because of his theory of condition reflexes. He called me to his office and said if I can get a story about the painting and a photograph, it will be wonderful.

So I put on my good suit; it was gray. And when I say "good" I mean "good," for by this time I was making more money than the editor. As I told you, I was never on the salary; I was paid entirely by the piece. The managing editor would mark after every edition what each of my stories was worth and here

we go. If it is an important story, I will get about 125 rubles, and if it is not so important, fifteen or twenty rubles. I wrote about everything: exhibitions, sports, fashions, the movies, the tee-ater. In one edition I had seven stories.

For the first time in my life I was living high. I even had a pair of shoes made. They were the most fanciest shoes as can be and, can imagine, of brown cowhide with wide, white, foam rubber soles. I ordered them from a small private shop. It was permitted for a man to have a private shop if only he himself will work— then there will be no exploration of labor. But to be able to afford these shoes, I had to write many hit stories. A pair of shoes by order cost between 600 and 700 rubles. When I got these shoes they were too tight on me; nevertheless, I walked the streets until I was dead.

It was also possible by now to buy silk. As Stalin say, "The life is getting better." I had my first silk dress made and this good, gray suit. I realize if I come for some material for a story and will be neatly dressed, I will have a different reception. And I like it besides.

So I put on the suit and the shoes and I bought a bunch of violets—they were in full bloom and you could buy them for a few kopecks—and I pinned them on in front. I also bought a second bunch that I carried in my hand.

I rang the bell and a woman opened the door. She looked exactly like woman looked a hundred years ago. Sometimes in Western movies they come like this: long, full skirt, tight bodice.

"I brought some flowers for Mr. Nesterov," I said. I had thought about a hundred approaches and had finally decided on this one.

The woman was taken completely by surprise. "Will you wait outside?" she said.

"No," I said. "I will wait inside."

She went away and in a moment or two I heard her open a door and say, "There are some flowers for you."

Then Nesterov came out and I approached him quickly and said, "I want you to have these flowers."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I need your help," I said very humbly. "And because I love your work."

You see, before I went to see him I went to the museum where was the pre-Revolutionary pictures and I studied every picture of his; then I went to the libraries and read every word I could find about him.

"I know you finish a portrait of Pavlov," I hurried on before he could say anything, "and I want very much to see it. I've just recently started reporting for the *Journal de Moscou* and I'm sure the French people would love so to hear about your work and see this latest picture."

"But I give no interviews to the Soviet papers," he said.

"It's not for the Soviet," I argued. "I want the world outside to see your painting."

He said he would think about it, but in the meantime if I'd like to look at the painting I could. So I came to the room and there was this huge painting. It was covered, but he uncovered it and I saw it was a most powerful portrait. It was really magnificent.

Then we talked and talked. I suppose after being so long in seclusion he enjoyed having somebody to talk to. Then I made the suggestion: "We will write this story together. I'm afraid my knowledge is not sufficient to write it as it ought to be written and, besides, it will be much more important if you lend your name to it."

He was charmed at my proposition, and then in a rush I said, "Now I will run and telephone for a photographer."

Of course the photographer was right on the street—I had

brought him with me. I told him to wait forty-five more minutes and then to come to the house; I didn't want to frighten Nesterov.

Then I ran back to the house and we made a beautiful story, which Nesterov practically dictated. Then the photograher came and we took many pictures of the Pavlov portrait and of other portraits.

It was a scoop! It was a Scoop Number One! Every newspaper in Moscow phoned and ask to use it and I made a lot of money. It was also marked "good," in the envelope for, as you understand, Willie, it was one fine piece of propaganda for the Soviets that this great man was still working.

12

The Balance of the Life

THOUGH I WAS making money as a reporter, I was having plenty of other troubles. The balance of the life, you know. It happens that this lady with whom I lived since I came from exile asked me to leave. She was unpleasant as can be—really mean and base. She said, "I don't want to have this widow of a counterrevolutionist in my house."

There is a law in Russia that a landlady can't tell you to leave. She can ask you nicely and you can make a friendly agreement; but she can't make you move unless the court decides it. So I was called to court and it was a very unhappy experience. Under usual circumstances, I have all the right on my side. I lived in this room—and of course, Karel did too—over five years and after I lived so long a time the room is supposed to be possessed by me.

But this woman was shouting that it hurt her Soviet feelings to have the widow of a counterrevolutionist in her house, so the court gave me only three months to get out.

I was just frantic. It was impossible to find any place for any amount of money at that time in Moscow. Then a friend told me she knows a woman who works for her as a day laborer who

has one room that is divided by a wall that does not go all the way up, and that she and two children sleep in one half the room and a daughter in the other half, and that she will let me have a bed in the half-room with the daughter for 200 rubles a month, which was roughly about $50.

I was pleased to learn this, but I was not at all sure the militia would allow me to live there. You see, in Russia when you move into a new apartment you must take your passport to the militia and they must assign you to live in this place, but sometimes when it is too crowded, they will not assign you. Of course, the landlady cannot rent me this place unless I get the permission.

As you must know every citizen in Russia when he reaches eighteen years old must have a passport, and every year he must go to the militia for a check-up. It's called the cleaning up of Moscow. On everybody's passport is marked where you're supposed to live and you must live there constantly. If you decide to go on a vacation, the first thing you must do when you arrive is go to the militia, so they will stamp on the passport the permission for you to stay at this place. To loose a passport in Russia is the biggest tragedy that can happen.

However, you can frequently take money and get the permission to live where you are not supposed to live. So I decided to take 3,000 rubles and also a Leica camera, which I borrowed from one of the newspaper's photographers, and hang right here on my front. I thought I'd play on two weaknesses of people—greediness and vanity. I was sure one would win. I decided, also, I would not go to a small man in the militia. I'd go to a top man with this plainly showing picture apparatus, which put me above the human being, for the Russians are crazy about gadgets.

So I came and was shown to this office where there was sitting this typical Russian officer in uniform. For a quick second I watched him, trying to decide which one of my weapons to use, and when I saw his eyes soften at the sight of the camera,

I judge that vanity will do. Indeed, already he was posing at the table.

I told him, "Comrade Chief, I am a reporter and our paper wants a story and picture of one of the best militia chiefs in Moscow."

I never thought it would be such a weapon!

I asked him some questions and then I took pictures from every angle, though I'd never taken a picture before, and, as I learned later, there was no film in the camera. I took him full-face, sideways, and then I stood on a chair and took him from above. "Now with pencil, please," I said.

He was mighty impressed.

Then I shook hands with easiness as if I have nothing else on my mind. The nerves of mine really surprised me. Then at the door, I turned casually and said, "By the way, I forgot to ask about a little thing you can do for me. I'm moving into a new apartment and must have the permission."

Without even looking at my name or where I live before or anything, he rang for the assistant and say, "Please see that this passport is taken care of personally."

In five minutes I had a fresh stamp with a flourishing signature on my passport. Indeed, everything was there. Sometimes it is written "temporary," but I got a permanent stamp.

So I moved and I was very happy. The children loved me, especially the oldest daughter, who was seventeen years old. I was really very good for her. I talked to her and read to her and discussed many things with her, for by this time I had a life behind me.

I, of course, was overcrowded but I had the feeling I was with family. I told the mother about Karel and she accepted the facts like a peasant woman. She was not frightened, but had a warm feeling and was sorry for me.

The room was part of an apartment that before the Revolution belonged to a very rich family. It contained eleven rooms,

one kitchen and one toilet. In Russia the toilet is never together with the bathroom. The apartment originally had a bathroom, too, but for three years now was living there an old woman with her cat. How she moved in there I don't know, but the bathtub was covered with a piece of board and she was sleeping there.

Soon after she moved in there, all the other occupants of the apartment had a meeting and declared she must free the bathroom so they could use the cold water and rinse their clothes in the bathtub, but she refused.

Then the occupants made a resolution that they need the bathroom and sent it to the authorities, and though the authorities said she must go, they were the lower authorities, and so the old woman applied to the higher authorities. Then the higher authorities referred it back to the lower authorities and said they must examine it again. Isn't it horrible? All that old woman's days concentrated on fighting for the right to sleep on this bathtub!

One evening when I was sitting in my room, she came and scratched at the door. During the years she had developed such an inferior complex she was more lowly than her cat.

"Please come in," I said, and in she crept in old rubbers, but no shoes, tied with rope, and on her body just a handful of rags. She was the complete end of the human being.

She had heard, she said, that I was working on a newspaper and she wanted me to write about her case. My God! It would be some news to publish in a propaganda paper for people abroad! Of course, I couldn't do it. I could only give her now and then some pieces of bread and soup, which I'm sure she gave immediately to this cat.

Altogether, there were over thirty-two people in this apartment. Each of the eleven rooms was occupied by a different family of three or four or five. On the door of the toilet was a list long as my arm who has to keep it clean, and there were always constant quarrels. If one room has four people, then

they must wash the toilet twice as often as the people in the room with two, so the two insisted, and so on and so on.

At first my landlady and I took turns, but later I paid her to wash my turn, and still later I began to use the public toilet for it was much more cleaner than ours. I lived right on Arbat Square—our window was even looking out on it—and every morning I went across this square and used the public toilet there.

Now comes the kitchen. When the apartment belonged to one family, they had a big stove in which they used wood; but now the big stove was divided between two families, and all the others used kerosene stoves. Every bit of space around the walls was taken with small tables and on top of the tables were these kerosene stoves. Even if this kitchen was painted every day, it would be black by night, and so it was leaved alone and never painted. Can imagine?

Oh, the quarrels there, especially over the kerosene stolen from the stoves. As kerosene was rationed and very expensive, everybody was always accusing everybody else of stealing their kerosene.

But the food was even more scarce and expensive than the kerosene. I saw it happen that a women, when she was cooking a piece of meat—something extraordinary like a ragout—she had a special lock fixed with a key by which she locked the lid to the pot. Anyway, locks or no locks, whenever somebody was cooking something good, all the children would stand around and try to take the smell of the something good out of the air.

13

The Saddest Romance One Can Imagine

THE MOST important thing as can be happened to me at a big skating rink in Moscow in November of 1936. You see I loved to skate more than anything. I was not very fancy, but fairly good—that's just to be modest for once in my life, for to tell the truth, I was really very, very good.

This evening when I was striding along fast and strong I saw in front of me a quivering figure, very unsure on his feet and z-zh-ip he went down. Then quickly with a z-zh-ip I cut the ice and came to a dramatic stop, and very beautifully my full skirt went around me.

Now I understand my outfit was a little strange for the skating, but it was the best I had then. I had on a quite bright blue silk dress with a circular skirt and on top of it I was wearing a quite shabby man's sweater, a beige-brown color, a black beret and heavy white socks and mits. I hadn't developed at this time the talent for matching things. But no matter, for a very big orchestra would play for the skating and everybody would look so much more beautiful with the graceful movements than he actually was.

Well, I helped the sprawled figure to his feet and immediately I saw he was a foreigner by the way he was dressed. His jacket and gloves and skates were perfect and he was also wearing a beret, which was most unusual for a Russian man in those days. He thanked me in Russian with the accent and I left him and went on my way. In Russia we consider it not polite to talk to a man you're not introduced to, and especially if he is a foreigner.

However as I went around I kept my eyes on him for my curiosity had jumped to the heaven—it was always before the Revolution and after the Revolution in Russia this great curiosity for the foreigner—and I noticed he kept his eyes on me. I pretended to pay no attention. Z-zh-ip I went by him. Z-zh-ip! Z-zh-ip! Once when I went by I heard him talking with a group of three people in English.

Then he fell down again quite close to me and as I assisted him once more to his feet I said, "It looks like I will have to help you."

"Will you?" he asked very humbly with the shining eyes.

"I can even teach you to dance," I told him and I took his hands and explained. "Now you just make this: one, two, three; one, two, three." He was a very poor dancer, but I did the complicated part going backwards. The orchestra played "The Blue Danube" waltz as if we especially asked and very soon we found we could go rhythmically together. We never spoke a word; we were so fascinated by the dancing. The evening was perfect. The music; the cold, sharp air; the lights; the gracefully moving people. We felt like we already know each other, for not even conversation can bring people so close together as dancing. Already, I suppose, it was the beginning of love.

When the music stop, we talk. He tells me he is an American, and has come one year to Russia to gather material on Russian folklore, both old and new, and I tell him I'm working on the *Journal de Moscou.*

Then the music play again and we dance again. Then his friends call him. I will remember forever how the woman call, "Robert, come here!" It is the first English I ever remember, "Robert, come here," and he excused himself and went to talk to them and I just left.

For several days I didn't go back to the skating rink, but kept very busy working in the evenings. I understood, maybe, he would come again to skate there and I was afraid of the development of this friendship because he is an American. Hundreds of people, because they were connected with the foreigners, were arrested, and so I thought I had better not get involved with him.

Then I was sitting at my desk one day, writing something, and I heard two people come up and this man on the paper said very officially, "Nila, I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Robert Magidoff." Robert asked me for a walk and I forgot all my resolutions and here we go.

After that I began to see him quite regularly. We went dating out to the tee-ater and hiking in the country and skating on the ice rink. Then suddenly an incident happened that almost ruined the romance in the bud. We were walking and a piece of dust came to my eye and there were tears just running. Robert in any circumstance, even on an uninhabited island, will always produce a clean, nice handkerchief. So it happened this time; he produced the handkerchief and gave it to me and I put it around my eye and came home with it, saying, "I will wash it and give it back tomorrow."

The next day I washed it and put it near the window to dry and the wind blew or something and it went away. I just left the room for one second and when I came back it was gone. I ran down the stairs—I lived on the second floor—and looked up and down the street, but the handkerchief was gone.

I was horrified. I was sure Robert would think I wanted his friendship just for this fine handkerchief. I went to all the shops

to try to find a handkerchief like this; but, my God, the few handkerchiefs I found were made of the roughest material that would tear your nose away. When I asked in one shop if they have a man's handkerchief the clerk ask, "What, madam?"

"A handkerchief," I say.

"I'm working here already for ten years," he say, "and I never heard of a handkerchief."

I went even to the second-hand stores. Americans would pay a lot with pleasure for the things they could buy in these second-hand stores: pearls, crystals, silver, rubies, diamonds, furs, grand pianos, but, of course, not one handkerchief. The old sheets and the old pillow cases when they would be torn would be used for the nose; a real handkerchief, never.

For days I would not see Robert because of this damned handkerchief. I kept telling him I had work to do and had no time to see him; but one day when I came out of my apartment house there he was waiting. I felt I ought to go through the ground I was so embarrassed. However, I never mentioned the handkerchief to him until years later and, of course, by then he had completely forgot it.

It was a long time, though, before I understood a handkerchief like this one was not so important to an American. Because of the terrible shortage of all kinds of consumer things in Russia, I felt a . . . a . . . how do you say it? . . . a awe, but really it was more than a awe, almost a reverence for American goods. The Russian government never considered worthwhile what the people like; it never spends the brain or the money for the bright, attractive things, just the absolute necessary things. It condemned as capitalistic tricks all the miracles of the five-and-ten.

So I admired extravagantly almost everything that Robert had; but one time I admired something that made a big joke. We were going on a picnic and he came with the dark glasses and it was the first time in my life I saw the dark glasses.

"Really, you can see through them?" I asked.

Robert got real proud of his country and said the technical technique in America is unbelievable. Take the glasses for an example. You can do anything with them. You can drop them on the floor, you can sit on them, and then he took the glasses and threw them down and they went into millions of pieces. That was the funniest thing as can be.

I wasn't an exception, though, in loving everything from America. All the Russian people loved everything from abroad. The Russians' favorite word is *zagranichny*—from abroad. I remember on the newspaper there was a messenger boy and he came up to me and ask me to do him the greatest favor. "Will you ask your American friend for the labels off his clothes? I want very much to have something *zagranichny*."

So Robert cut the labels from his pajamas, his shirts, his BVDs, his hat, from everything possible—and brought them to me in an envelope, and the next day the messenger boy showed up all in labels on the outside. There came Macy suddenly on the back of the cap and Gloomingdale on the front of the shirt, but the funniest alliance, as I understand now, was the Brooks Brothers on the Russian tie.

Every time I went out with Robert, everybody sit and wait my appearance and greet me with, "So?" which means what I learn about America? Sometimes I had no time to learn anything—we were busy loving—and then at the end I'd say to Robert, "Please tell me something quick to tell about America."

However, it was most difficult to find in Moscow a place for hugging and kissing. Robert was renting a room in one part of Moscow for a fabulous sum, but under a condition that he never bring a wife or somebody to live with him and, of course, I had no room of my own, and it was not permitted to go like to the Cherokee Park for loving, and we had no car for parking.

Then I got a wonderful idea. We would go to the big station

where trains come in every few minutes, and whenever a train came in we would rush into each other's arms and kiss and kiss, and then wait for the next train. But one day the militia man came up to us and say, "You have met enough trains now. Go home!"

That was the one funny incident of our courting, for to tell you the truth it was the saddest romance one can imagine. Not because of me, but because of the circumstances. By this time I love Robert very dearly and he loves me; however, I thought his stay in Russia was almost over and if I married him I will never get permission to go out of the country. Robert will have to leave me and I know how hard that will be on him, especially if there is a child, for I understand by now how wonderfully kind and gentle he is.

So I explain him all this, but he argues he loves me so much he will fight until he gets me out. After I marry him he will register at the American embassy that I am his legal wife, not just his girl friend. I am his wife for good or for worse whom he want to take with him home.

I decided I must go out of Moscow and think it over. So I went out to a Government Home of Rest for newspaper people, musicians and artists and I ask Robert not to come there, but anyway he did. He came every day with a box of chocolates on the only train from Moscow that took three and a half hours to make the trip, spent fifty minutes with me on the station platform, and then went back on the only train returning to Moscow. I was certainly very much impressed.

Of course, I couldn't ask him to spend the night in this Home of Rest because he was a foreigner. It would be the biggest scandal ever happen at this Home of Rest to have a foreigner inside of it. This fact helped me realize that our marriage will never work. I am so proud of him. Such an educated man he is and such new horizons he opened for me; but I will always be afraid to ask him in a Russian house or to ask him to meet

my Russian friends. I will always be in terror that the militia will come and arrest me and then what will he do? So I say to Robert, no, and go back to Moscow.

Then in 1937 we start to hear about new arrests in Russia. Mostly they are arresting the wives of men who were counterrevolutionists; the men who had opposed the rise of Stalin. This struck terror to my heart for of course Karel was one of these counterrevolutionists. For more than a year now he had been dead; but I felt sure his fight against Stalin was not forgotten.

How right I was! One day I came home and my landlady in real Russian fashion, like I'm already dead, clasps her hands in front of her and sways from side to side and says the militia man had been there. He had come with the summons for me to appear on a certain date at the regional headquarters. I knew, of course, what it means. This was the new technique: instead of arresting you he just left the summons for you to go to the militia where you will be given the place of your exile. What a sadness I felt! I thought I am finished as a human being. I will never come back from the militia station.

I telephoned Robert and told him I must see him at once. When we meet he knows by my face what has happened and he at once begs me to marry him. "Your only chance is to marry me immediately," he argues. "If it save you, wonderful. If not, you go to exile and I go to America." By this time Robert had got his visa extended for six months and was writing free-lance stories for United States newspapers and magazines.

The next morning Robert took his passport and I took mine and we went to the marriage office. There were no flowers, no wedding dress, no nothing. Everything was frozen in me. I still didn't know whether it was the right thing to do, but Robert kept saying, "Oh, darling, cheer up! We're going to be married!"

Now they change the marriage office completely, but when

Robert and I were married, there were only two windows there —one was for deaths and births and one was for marriages and divorces. The ceremony takes you ten minutes. "Passports," the man say, and *click, click,* it's finished. He fills in the names, the dates of birth, stamps the passports and gives you a certificate of marriage and that's all. No witnesses needed. Nothing. We paid him three rubles and left. A marriage certificate is the cheapest thing you can buy in Russia.

Robert says, "Let's drink champagne," and so we went to the Café National, the most fanciest, the most expensive café in Russia. It's the only place you can order apple pie à la mode. And Robert say, "Now don't argue; you are my wife now and we're going to have champagne and little cakes."

I had champagne and little cakes and I was throwing out all night. Happily for the bridegroom, he was not with me then. We had no place to be together. It was five months before we lived as man and wife and then we lived in one room that Gordon Kashin, an American correspondent, let us have in his three-room apartment.

But back to the summons from the militia. When the day came, Robert walked with me to the headquarters building and wanted to go into the office, but I said, "No, better not. If they arrest us both, who will fight?" Poor Robert, he was hurt by the Communists, I feel sure, more than most other foreigners, for he came so close to the bureaucracy and cruelty of the system. You know, you sometime read in books, the hero went pale. Well, I never saw anybody so pale in my life as Robert. He was gray-pale. Even his lips were pale. My heart wrings now when I think about it. I don't know how I looked, but I was certain I'd never see Robert again. Only God knows how horibly I felt.

We held both hands and kissed. Then I opened the door and the steps went up and I thought I'd never climb there. My feet were like stones when I moved them. I came to this smelly

office and I showed my summons to a man sitting there. He said, "Sit down and wait. You will be called."

Then I saw four more woman sitting there and by the expressions on their faces I knew they went through the same nightmare I did. I wanted to go down and tell Robert there is a line there and I got up, but the man say with such a roughness, "Sit down and wait your turn."

All the woman was called before I was and what impressed me most was when a woman was called, she went into the next office and never come back, and so it was completely clear for me she is arrested and taken inside to prison.

Finally the man call, "Nila Ivanovna Shevko," and I get up and go to the other office where they give me a long questionnaire. They ask your last name, your Christian name, your date of birth and your birthplace, your husband's name and his occupation and so on.

Of course, they thought they knew my husband's name and that he was already dead, so can imagine with what circumstances I wrote, "Robert Magidoff, American correspondent." Then I handed in this questionnaire and in spite of my terror, I waited with devilish pleasure for the man to get to this piece of surprising information.

Ah, it was a comedy! He took the questionnaire with the boring look, for every day hundreds of people are arrested and fill these things out. Then suddenly his hair stand on end and I enjoy myself immensely. I know that even if this marriage to Robert will not save me, the NKVD will be most unpleasantly shocked to see I have an American husband working for foreign newspapers. I understand very well that at this time they don't want an American to come so close to the real Russian life.

Then he jump from his chair and say, "Will you please sit down?"

I say nothing, but sit down very deliberately.

He disappears into the chief's office and in about three minutes he returns and say most politely, "Will you come back in a week? In the meantime you will sign this paper that you will not leave Moscow until after the second interview."

The week seemed interminable, but when I returned I was received immediately by the chief officer and he say, "The most horrible thing has happened. It's all a terrible, terrible mistake your being asked to come here." And he takes the summons with my name written on it and tears it in little pieces. "I most humbly apologize for such a stupid blunder."

"You mean I'm free?" I say, scarcely able to believe my ears.

He laugh like an amateur on the stage, "Ho, ho, ho," and say, "Of course. Of course. You can travel where you wish—that is inside the Soviet Union. And I do hope you will try to explain to your husband it was all a mistake."

"I will do my best," I say in the meanest way. "He is downstairs now, waiting for me."

As I went out, the man in the other office, who spoke so rough to me the first time, run and open the door, but God! I didn't even notice him.

On the street just where I left him, Robert is standing, and I run to him and put my arms around him and cry, "I'm free! I'm free! I can go any place!"

After this, especially after we get the room with Gordon Kashin, is the most happiest time. It was the first time anybody take care of me. You American woman will not understand this, for you are accustomed to the husband taking care of the woman, being sorry for you when you have the headache, getting a wrap for you when you are cold, asking when he comes home in the evening, "Darling, what have you being doing with yourself today?" and inviting you out for special suppers now and then; you know, showing the attention in all

these little things. Well, I never experienced it before and I just bask in it with such a pleasure. It was pure and untouched happiness.

Then Robert became assistant to the chief of the AP Bureau in Moscow and went to the United States for a short visit. While he was gone I was telephoned to from the Russian Foreign Office, where we had applied for an apartment for a long time, that they had an apartment for us. I thought, of course, it would be a room and a bathroom, but my God, it was three rooms. I sent Robert a cable, "We got apartment," and in just two weeks he came rushing back with boxes loaded with things because the apartment was completely empty except for the most necessary furniture.

Robert had bought dishes and silver and the most terrific kitchen things—the things to turn the eggs, the pot to make the coffee, the beater to beat the eggs and frying things. Oh, to unpack it! Nothing will ever compare with unpacking these boxes. Never before did Robert like to shop, but he tell me that every time he bought something, even the can opener, he saw my happy face. There was only one disappointment. Robert has very plain taste and he bought very plain dishes. I want them all colors with big flowers.

The best thing he bought was the electric toaster with the pumping bread. Wonderful is not the word! I telephoned all my Russian friends—by this time the arrests and trials had subsided—and I said to them, "Please do come for American toast!" I ask husbands too. Everybody. When they came I put the toaster on an oval table in the middle of the room. I put two pieces of bread in it and then everybody sat around and waited.

Then z-zh-ip the toast pumped up! Ah-h-h, there is no way to express my friends' faces; their childish happiness at this miracle thing. Then I buttered the two slices and passed them around and here we went again. Everybody waited, scarcely

breathing. Then z-zh-ip and two more slices. I'm really afraid to say how much we ate of this amazing American toast. It sounds unbelievable; but we spent the whole evening around this toaster and everybody eat five or six slices—about ten pounds of bread in all.

I remember I wore for the toasting a housecoat with a zipper that was going from the knee up to the neck, which Robert had also brought from America. I had never seen a zipper like this before and, naturally, none of my Russian friends had. Robert said the coat was just to wear around the house when there was no company, but I thought it was absolutely beautiful—it was long to the floor with a little train in back. The guests simply adored the zipper. Poor souls, they were so fascinated with the zipper zipping and the toast pumping they were in a state of complete exhaustion by the time they went home.

Robert felt I should go around with Americans more. When we went ice skating and saw Americans, he would bring me up to them and introduce me as his wife. Soon one of these couples invited us to dinner.

I'll never forget this dinner. I was in a frenzy about what to wear, and I drove Robert into a frenzy too. Do I wear a hat? I asked him. Do I wear gloves? How long should my dress be? What color? He begged me to stop worrying. They are kind people, he said, and they know you're a simple Russian peasant.

So we came to the party and they passed the martinis and I took one and that was the first cocktail I ever had in my life. In Russia it is not customary to drink before dinner. In an ordinary home everybody just sits and tries to squeeze the conversation and then everybody will be invited to the table and will drink vodka with the food.

So here I am drinking the martini and everybody talking to me in English how difficult is the Russian language and I not understanding scarcely a word. When Robert was courting me he said he would give me some English lessons and he did, but

the day we were married, he dropped the lessons dead—not one more lesson. I suppose I was not a very inspiring pupil.

As we drink and talk, a man in a white coat passes a lot of little things to eat—all very nice, but never before have I seen such *little* things—one bite and z-zh-ip they're gone. So I whisper to Robert, "Shall I eat a lot of these little things or will there be something else?"

Then the man in the white coat came and said dinner is served and we got up and went into the dining room. The hostess put me on the right of the host but I did not appreciate the gesture for I was not acquainted with this compliment.

Do you know, before we ate a thing, the man in the white coat took off the plate that was already on the table and put another plate and a bowl with soup in its place? Then he pass the crackers and celery and olives and all those things. This was all easy, but when the second course came I was just ruined. For the first time in my life I was served a platter of meat. I was served it even before the hostess because of this damned honor of sitting on the right of the host, so I could not watch her and see what to do. I thought I would just die.

The most I was afraid of was the servants. They were all Russians and the Russians are the most class-conscious of any people. They know I don't belong at this fancy dinner and they scorn me like I can't tell you. They really snobbed me. I was all the time like sitting on pins and needles. Poor Robert, he suffered too. He knows how serious I take these things. After the meat came the vegetables. Oh, my back was a hard nut of tense!

Finally, the servants took off everything and I thought, thank God! it is over; but then came this last thing, the dessert. It was some kind of ring, a quite fat ring, with a sauce in the middle. I understand now I was supposed to cut a little piece of this one and then take sauce from the inside; but I cut all

the way through this ring and the sauce rushed out and ran all around the platter.

Quickly, the servant jerked it away from me and stomped out of the room, his head high in the air and his eyes looking down his nose. I was so furious I could have struck him between the eyes. Fortunately for the other guests there was a second ring in the kitchen, and in a few minutes he returned with it, but he never approached within three feet of me.

After this torture—I really can't call it another way—we went back to the living room for coffee. When some time had passed I began once more to enjoy the beautiful life.

I must tell you from that night on I learned pretty fast the American ways. I didn't know a lot of things. You just can't imagine. American children learn them like they breathe, but nobody ever told me how to do all kinds of things: how to unfold your napkin (you know, the first dinner I had at Gordon Kashin's apartment I didn't use mine at all; I thought it would be terrible to soil its white innocence and I looked at Robert for approval, but afterwards he told me it was put there to use); how to hold your knife and fork; how to serve yourself from a platter.

Robert, of course, noticed when I married him that I didn't know these things; but he was so kind and gentle he wouldn't mention them. Now, though, when I insisted on knowing, he told me many things: not to reach across the table for something you wanted; not to eat chicken with your fingers at a formal dinner and so on.

The most complicated thing for me to learn was how to serve myself, so one day I fried a whole chicken and Robert, with a napkin on his hand, just like the man in the white coat, served it on a platter to me. He did it very seriously, not cracking a smile. Then he made me eat what I took with a knife and fork. I tell you it was real work, trying to finish this chicken without doing it naturally with the fingers.

So life went on until June 22nd, 1941, when we heard on the radio that Germany had invaded Russia. Soon after that many Americans sent their wives back to the United States and Robert was most anxious to send me. However, he couldn't get permission from the Russian government. He had applied for a visa for me soon after we were married. Then every six months he wrote a letter and asked has the decision yet been made; but like the real Russian bureaucracy, they never said no and they never said yes. They just said they had taken it under consideration and that Robert would be informed when the time came. We were both terribly afraid, of course, that they would never give the permission for me to go.

The war finally broke the stalemate. The American ambassador, Lawrence Steinhardt, called Robert one day and said, "I think I have good news for you. I think we have succeeded in getting permission for Nila to go to the United States. We have arranged with the Russians to exchange her and Pauline Habicht for two loads of high octane gas." Pauline was the wife of Herman Habicht, the assistant chief of the United Press bureau.

That was all Ambassador Steinhardt told Robert and for many years Robert bragged that he was one of two men who knew exactly what his wife was worth—one load of high octane gas. Thirteen years later he and I learned that Pauline and I and several other people were exchanged not for gas but for a prominent Russian who was being detained in the United States.

Anyway, the morning after the ambassador telephoned, I got a call from the Moscow bureau that gives visas and they invited me to come there. When I arrived, they say the visa is granted, but they must warn me that I must renounce my Russian citizenship. This was no more than I expected. Nevertheless, it was a terrible wrench. I was never a member of the Communist party and God knows I had suffered at the hands

of the Communist regime; still I loved my country, my family and my friends, and it hurt me to turn my back upon them.

Everybody at the American embassy, though, helped me to feel better. Robert and I went there as soon as I got my visa and they all seemed so happy that I was going to Robert's country and would some day be an American citizen. Everybody in the embassy knew there are two kinds of marriages between Russian woman and American man. One is when Russian woman's aim is to get everything she can from the American man because of the hard life, and the other one is for love. Everybody knew Robert's and my marriage was a real love.

Now we had to decide whether Robert would come with me to America. This was a very serious decision, for Robert recently had become chief of the NBC bureau in Moscow and broadcast over the radio. Robert said if I am afraid he will come with me, but I said absolutely not, for I understood how important this new job was for him. I never thought until now how brave I was to come here alone.

Freddy Rhinehardt, the first secretary of the embassy, made out an affidavit for me for, of course, when I renounced my Russian citizenship I had to give up my passport. It was a long paper with my name and a photograph and a description of me, and it had a big, red stamp on it and was rolled and tied with a red ribbon; it was really a very beautiful document.

I first went from Moscow to Vladivostok, which took nineteen days as our train had to leave the main tracks frequently to let pass trains with troops going to the front. At Vladivostok I caught a small freighter for Japan, then from Japan I went to Shanghai, and from Shanghai I sailed for San Francisco, and from San Francisco, as I told you in the very beginning, to New York and the three-room apartment on Twenty-first Street.

14

How I Learn English

ALMOST IMMEDIATELY when I arrived in New York a man telephoned and asked me would I participate in a program at Madison Square Garden. He had seen a little Associated Press notice in the papers that I had arrived in the United States and he wanted very much that I talk on how Moscow lives in wartime.

"But I can't speak English," I said.

That was perfectly O.K. he said. I needed to say only a very few words to bring an eyewitness touch to the meeting. All right, I said, for though I was no longer a Russian citizen, I still felt warmly toward the Russian people and wanted to do anything I could to help them defeat fascism and win through to a more beautiful life. I knew the narrowness and ruthlessness and cruelty of the Communist party as well as anybody; but I didn't feel that the Communist party and the Russian people were the same. I hoped and believed that after a long, sacrificial war, the political situation in Russia will change and there will come a good life for the people.

However, I decided not even to mention the political situa-

tion. This didn't seem to me the time. When the war is over, then the Soviet's internal problems can be discussed. Now the job was to win the war. Remember, this was in 1941, and the United States and Russia were allies. They were in the war together against the common enemy, Germany, and anything that anybody could say or do to help the Russian people survive the Nazis' invasion or to rouse the Americans to support the war effort was a patriotic duty. I especially felt the obligation as I had left Moscow when she was being terribly bombed for the safe life in the United States.

So I spoke in Madison Square Garden. Never in my life did I expect the possibility of the existence of such a big place. I had thought when the man said "garden," it will be a small, informal place with flowers and trees, but my God, here is a building so big the people completely disappear. Oh, to see for the first time the American crowd in action! The people moving about, shouting, laughing. The man and boys everywhere selling something—the hot dogs, the popcorn, the ice-cream cones, the chocolate bars; the Coca-Cola bottles opening and the Pepsi-Colas hitting the spots. Everybody in full swing!

A Russian crowd is very disciplined, very glooming, not one bit like a crowd in the United States. I tell you that crowd was absolutely terrific—everybody in action except Lord Halifax, the British ambassador at the time to the United States, and the main speaker for the evening. Of course, at first, I didn't know who he is, but I know he is British, sitting there like he swallow a stick.

Mr. Joseph E. Davies was there, too, and, I believe, Mayor La Guardia. I spoke so many times with Mayor La Guardia. I'm not sure he was there that evening or not, but I think so. It was the biggest rally one can imagine.

I don't remember much about the program until a man came over to me and whispered, "You will be next." I had my speech written down in English with Russian letters and it

consisted of exactly fifty-five words. "Ladies and Gentlemen," I said into the microphone and it sounded just like I barked.

When I finished I sat down, but immediately a man come and said I must do the speech over; that after the first words the microphone had busted and nobody had heard me. Can imagine? So I got up and went back and that's why I always say I spoke twice in Madison Square Garden. I had a real nerve. And oh! it was the most dramatic. There I was in a black dress; my face very pale with no make-up, not even lipstick, and I told of the Russian people's sacrifice and that they must win this war to have a new chance at a better life.

The Madison Garden went wild. They whistled, which at first froze me, for when they whistle in Russia they don't like something, and they shouted and they clapped. It was something wonderful! My tears were running.

Well, the next day the Russian War Relief Organization telephoned me they had many invitations for me to speak. You see, the whole meeting was broadcasted and people wanted me to come and speak in all kinds of places.

"I can't do it," I say, "until I learn English."

"How long will that take?" the lady ask.

I stop and think for a minute and say, "At least two weeks."

She make a gasping noise and say, "O.K."

And now I'll tell you how I learn English. I took a sheet of paper about a yard long and I cut it up into pieces of about five or six inches, and on each piece I copied down fifty words in phonetic writing. Then I tacked one of these pieces by my bed, another in the kitchen over the stove, another over the sink, another just where I came to unlock the apartment door and one I took with me wherever I walk or go on the subway or bus.

I remember my very first contact with the baseball was because one of these damned lists. I was walking on the street saying the words, and just ahead of me was walking this boy

with two bats for the baseball on his shoulders. Suddenly somebody call him and he turn around and the bats hit me on the side of the head and knock me cold out.

Every day before I went to sleep I learned fifty words and every night I prepared new slips for the next day and nailed them in these places where every time I lift my eyes I will see them.

I had no teacher; she would be too slow. I felt the grammatical mistakes will not be important. If I know the words and pronounce them correctly the people will understand me. Of course, at first no matter how hard I tried, I did not pronounce correctly. I spoke once and a man came up and said, "Thank you so much. I didn't understand a word you said, but it was beautiful." Can imagine? I put my stomach and my soul in this speech and he didn't understand one word.

To help my pronunciation I went to the movies. Sometimes I went to the same picture two and three times to hear the dialogue. Then I began to study poetry to learn English. I not only read the poetry, but I wrote down every word phonetically.

While I was studying the poetry I became very involved with Shakespeare. I liked him tremendously. One day I decided to send Robert a cable about this infatuation. I came to the Western Union and write, "I fall in love with Shakespeare," and the girl when she read it don't want to receive it. She say, "It's nonsense to send such a cable in time of war."

"My dear girl," I say, "love and poetry and Shakespeare help win the war."

I learned long passages and I longed to act Hamlet. Not Ophelia, mind you. Hamlet. When I was alone in the Twenty-first apartment, or in a crowd, I will say them to myself. I remember I was dining in Book-Cadillac Hotel in Detroit. While I was waiting to be served, I was reciting the final speech of Hamlet in the second act:

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.

When I was really enjoying myself, the tears flowing, a very high-ranking admiral came up to me and said, "I beg your pardon, madam. May I be of some assistance?"

Like a flash I wake up and say, "No thank you. I'm just acting Hamlet."

Then he introduce himself and invite me to join him and his daughter at the next table. I say, "Thank you," and when we reach the table he explain to his daughter, "My dear, she was not suffering. She was reciting Shakespeare."

Another time I was speaking somewhere and afterwards somebody told me I could get a record made by John Gielgud of Hamlet's monologue that begins, "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt." So I went to the shop and say to the clerk, "Have you this record, 'O, that this too too solid flesh would melt'?"

He say, "Ah, the reducing monologue. I'm so sorry, madam, we're just out of it."

"I'm ashamed of you!" I say to him. "You should know it by heart and tell everybody how beautiful it is." Right there in the shop with real feeling I recite:

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!

However, no matter how much poetry I recite and how hard I study, I make plenty of mistakes. On the corner of Twenty-first Street was a little grocery, and one day I came there and said to the man, "I'd like a small jar of honeymoon, please."

After that I almost had to move from the apartment. The grocery man will be selling something and he sees me pass by and he will drop the bag and rush to the door and ask, "Lady, how much honeymoon you want today?"

Then one night I came to the John Vandercooks and I was so late I said, "I'm sorry, but I had to push the crowd aside with my a-lashes."

"Your eyelashes are not very long for that," John said. Then I learned what a-lashes are. Of course, he was right; the Lord forgot to give me any, and what I should have said was "elbows."

Another time I was speaking at a big dinner meeting at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles and I said something on the radio about the Colonial Dam Daughters. Such a laugh! So I stop dead and said to the chairman of the meeting—I remember his name to this moment; he was Judge Person M. Hall, the newly-elected chairman of Russian War Relief for Southern California—"What's the funny about?"

"You really don't know?" he say.

"No," I answered truthfully.

"Well, I'll explain you later."

Of course, I find out that what I meant to say was Daughters of the American Revolution and the Colonial Dames.

In Florida once I saw a sign in front of a hotel, "For Gentiles Only" and I turned to my hostess and said, "Isn't it nice they accept only gentle people?"

Nevertheless, in spite of these mistakes, I continue to study sixteen hours a day and I did make progress. When I was returning once from Boston on the train I was repeating *Hamlet*. When I reached New York a woman approached me and said,

"I heard you say in your speech that six months ago you couldn't speak English and I didn't believe you, but now, after watching you on the train for four straight hours, I do."

I told her, "Thank you so much," but what I really should have said was, "Thank you, Mr. Shakespeare, so much."

15

Here I Am Brought to the Hollywood Bowl

I WENT at the beginning of my first summer in America to Tree Tops, which is the home in Connecticut of Mrs. Earl Barnes, the mother of Joseph Barnes whom Robert and I knew in Moscow. She was an old lady with very young and beautiful eyes and with the most gracious manners one can imagine. She has four children and about sixteen grandchildren—maybe more. Almost everybody calls her Aunt Anna.

This was the first time I saw and smell the family life in an American home. It gave me such a powerful, such a terrific desire to have some day a home like it, I felt I can survive everything in between. There was this warm, gentle atmosphere where everybody in the family comes on Sundays and tells what they do during the week, and where the mother, because there are no servants, makes the dinner with her own hands. I do believe when you do the efforts yourself to receive your family and friends that makes the times to remember.

Then after dinner everybody takes turns washing the dishes.

Even the man! Never before had I seen a man washing dishes and as progressive as I was I was very shocked. I thought it wasn't dignifying. Now, of course, I think it's very undignifying if the man doesn't wash the dishes. As to this custom, I've become 102 per cent American.

That first Sunday, though, when I came into the kitchen with the dishes piled up to the ceiling and saw Bernard, one of Aunt Anna's sons, a very elegant man, preparing to wash them, I, horrified, said, "Oh, please, I'll do them."

"No, no," said Aunt Anna. "Bernard will wash them."

And Bernard went on as if I hadn't spoken, his face already set with this unpleasant look of determination to wash the dishes. He pursed his lips, he steeled his eyes, and he took off his coat and made the water. He first put in the powder and then beat it up all foamy with a spoon. I must say I was very much impressed with the efficiency of the movements.

I was always learning something worth while at Aunt Anna's. The first time I came there for a dinner in the evening very shortly after I arrived in New York, I was impressed as can be with the dining room table. It was out of this world with the mats and candles and flowers. Lighting a room with candles by necessity is altogether different from decorating a table with candles for pleasure, and I feel every family should eat with the candles and flowers at least once a week; it will bring the family together like the reading of poetry.

Then Aunt Anna used to do the bread for the family. I thought, of course, to buy the bread in the store is more fancy, but Aunt Anna believed strongly in baking. One day that summer she baked four extra loaves and made some jam and put them in a kind of basket and said to me, "Come, Nila, I want to take these things to my neighbor across the road."

"Is he very poor?" I asked; and when she answered, I got the surprise of my life.

"No," she say, "it is Efrem Zimbalist, the famous violinist."

When Mr. Zimbalist acted as if he was happy to get this bread and jam, I thought he was pretending. I couldn't understand giving such simple food to people unless they were hongry.

Aunt Anna also introduced me to T. S. Eliot. Sitting around the fire on cool evenings, we were reciting his poetry, even me with my poor English. And she taught me manners and many other things. I used to eat the minute I had food on my plate and I was already through before half the people was served. So one evening she took me for a walk and she said very sweetly, "Nila, I know you don't mean to be rude, but you just don't understand the American manners. You never start eating until everybody is served unless the hostess say, "Go ahead and eat while it is hot. And you never eat dessert until everybody is served."

I enjoyed learning these little things and I said to her, "Please tell me everything." Of course, Robert had taught me a lot, but a man doesn't pay attention to the little things and, anyway, I had grown up so crudely I needed all the teachers I could get.

By this time I was in the full swing of my speaking career, which continued with only a few weeks rest now and then for the next three years. Sometimes I spoke at rallies for the sale of United States War Bonds, sometimes for Community Chest War Funds, sometimes for Russian War Relief and sometimes for all three causes together.

During the war, remember, they made meetings out of everything—childbirths, marriages, cocktail parties, balls, everything. I thought even at the funerals they will make meetings. I spoke in all kinds of places and under all kinds of conditions and, of course, without pay, but I must say it took quite a while for me to get accustomed to the idea of speaking at luncheons and dinners. In Russia at luncheons and dinners they have toasts to the glorious victory, but never speeches.

I believe this is why Americans have troubles with their stomachs; they spoil them with all these speeches.

Take for example those poor man that belong to that club with the strange name of Rotary. I tried to find out if there was any kind of system to their programs and there was none. Absolutely none. They have to listen to whatever their program chairmans can grab. It can be about manners, morals, politics, the wars, or what to do after the wars. I was worried then and I still am that these poor man fill up their minds quite often with unnecessary knowledge that means nothing to their hearts. Maybe, though, it is good for business.

Anyway, I found these Rotary clubs and all American audiences sympathetic. Sometimes in a tense moment I said something very funny when I didn't mean to be funny, but simply because I don't know the right words, and nobody laughs; but when it's an appropriate place and I said something funny they laugh wonderfully.

I was described in the newspapers these years in every manner you can imagine. I was plump, I was thin, I was tall, I was short, I was gay, I was sad. Once in a small town in upstate New York the newspaper say, "Today will speak in City Hall, Nila Magidoff, wife of H. V. Kaltenborn." Of course, my first instinct was to deny it, for how will Robert feel in Moscow if he will hear I'm married to H. V. Kaltenborn, and even more worse, how will Mrs. Kaltenborn feel if she will hear her husband has another wife; but the program chairman say if I deny it, then it will be in the New York *Times* and the *Herald Tribune* and all the papers and, as it is, nobody except the people in this town, who aren't too many, know I'm married to Mr. Kaltenborn. Another time I was a Russian princess, and several times I was the wife of Molotov and this really made me mad.

Frequently I competed with attractions much too stiff for me. I spoke in movie houses before movies, when all I could

see were the very sad eyes of boys and girls waiting patiently for the picture to begin. Once I was even on the program with a trained seal. He spoke no words, but he made noises that sounded like German. He was trained to make a speech like Hitler, and when he finished he applauded himself. He was really magnificent and I enjoyed him immensely, but he was not my idea of a companion attraction.

I go in these years to forty-seven states. I don't mean I pass on them; I stop and speak on them. I miss only Alabama and I cherish Alabama in a special corner of my heart as a place I never go. I moved so fast. I was just going and going and going and every day I meet new people. Mostly they were as kind as can be, but there was scarcely any time to make friends. To make friends you must eat a lot of salt and bread together, and what you think I got? Cold chicken and peas.

I'm a homely person. I like a home and I want to be in it; yet, those years I have no roots; I'm just driving all the time. Once I was alone on a bus in Connecticut after the rush hour of the morning, and all along the streets the driver was opening the door and calling to people, "Hello, hello. How's Grandmother today?" And the people would call back, "Better, thank you," and he would say, "Good. I'm glad to hear it."

The bus driver knew everybody and soon I began to cry. Big sobs exploded out my throat and tears ran.

"What's the matter, lady?" the bus driver asked, turning completely around in his seat to look at me. He evidently thought I had lost somebody in the war.

"Nobody knows me," I answered. "And I know nobody. I want to belong somewhere. I want to have a home and plant some trees and see them grow."

Quickly he stopped the bus and came back and sat next to me and patted my arm lightly. "Don't cry, lady," he say. "It's the war. Nobody really lives now. Just wait until this war is over and then you'll have a home and plant trees."

I was speaking in some kind of school and instead of putting me out at the corner, he drove me straight to the door and when I got out, we shook hands. . . . I do wish I had asked his name.

I traveled everywhere those years by bus and train coach. As I neared a city or town by bus I used to watch out for the sign "Welcome"; and if there was no such sign I felt offended. I simply adored reading the way the towns advertise themselves.

You know, Willie, how in the United States if there is something, it is the most something in the world? Take, for sample, the water in Salt Lake City. It is salty, so of course it is the most salty. So it is with almost every city and town, each is famous for the most something.

Unfortunately, I don't remember the dates I was anywhere except in two or three instances. One of these was June 21, 1942, when I spoke for the War Bond sales in the Hollywood Bowl to mark the anniversary of the day Hitler began the invasion of Russia, but why they want to celebrate this date I certainly don't know.

First, they want Mrs. Roosevelt to come speak, and if not Mrs. Roosevelt, then Joseph E. Davies, and if not Joseph E. Davies, then some other distinguished person; but I, who nobody want, was the substitute for all of them.

I was notified by the Western Union I must be dressed fancy as can be and I certainly was. I wore a white lace with a heavy green-brocaded jacket lined in white satin and long gloves.

So here I am brought to the Hollywood Bowl and, my God, I don't believe I was ever so scared in Madison Square Garden. It holds, I believe, 30,000, and is open to the sky. I felt like a little ant. Everybody that performs here, I feel, must be perfect, for he won't only talk to the people, but to the God.

Edward G. Robinson introduced Olivia de Haviland and

Olivia de Haviland introduced me, and when I come to the front of the stage there is no reaction; they are so shocked, for I am so glittering.

I am frightened to death, though, for I can't speak without eyes—I simply must see the people's eyes—but it's pitch-black dark and the stage is about a half-mile from the first row. I can't see anything. Not anything!

I say into the microphone, "Dear friends," and the darkness says back to me "DEAR FRIENDS DEAR FRIENDS dear friends." Then I say again, "Dear friends," and again the darkness, "DEAR FRIENDS DEAR FRIENDS dear friends."

I'm absolutely lost, and then I see there is a young violinist, with the anxious eyes and big interest, sitting with the orchestra already on the stage just to one side of me, his volin and bow in his hands. I turn slightly and make my whole speech to him, and thank God, he reacts beautifully. He cry in the right places and he laugh in the right places.

Because of him I am a hit. The people crowd around me so I think I will be crushed to death before I can get out. It was at the time Frank Sinatra was at the pitch of his fame. He was singing somewhere that night in Hollywood so all the policeman was guarding him and there was not one left for me. Anyway, who would have thought I will need watching? Can imagine, the people came and picked buttons off my green coat for souvenirs?

Finally, however, Leopold Stokowski, who was the conductor of the orchestra, got me out and asked me to go with him to a swish-swish party. The house is built in this fabulous Hollywood construction. There is a huge hall and from this hall you go three steps down to a beautifully equipped bar where all the walls are signed with autographs of famous people.

The host asked me to sign so I took the pencil, made some musical lines and signed, "Verdi."

"What you mean, signing 'Verdi'?" he ask.

I say, "Sir, I'm not famous, and if I write my own name people all the time will ask who she is, but you will never have to explain who is Verdi."

The next day I had free from speaking and I went to the beach. There was some young people playing volley ball. I stopped and watched them and when they saw the desire to play written so openly on my face they, like somebody watching while you're eating so you have either to stop eating or ask them to eat, asked would I like to play.

I said I would love to. I played with such an abandon I tore a ligament in my leg. I never understood how I do it for I always played volley ball in Moscow on a very good team. In fact, I was the only woman on the team and I was really very, very good. You think, Willie, that now I'm energetic. Well, just imagine twenty years off my life. Then I was really inexhaustible.

I remember when I was just beginning to go with Robert, I asked him if he ever played volley ball and he said, yes, when he was at the University of Wisconsin he played an excellent game. So I spoke to my team and asked their permission to bring an American to play with them. I told them he was one of the best volley-ball players in America. They agreed and I brought him and it was the most ashamed thing I ever went through in my life.

All my boys put on clean shirts for the occasion and then start to play. Robert was playing in my place and I'm telling you it was the saddest performance one can imagine. Poor Robert was definitely not on the sport side. He was not quick; he was clumsy and so well mannered. If another player was going for the ball, he'd give the way and, as you know, manners are not so important in volley ball. Thank goodness, after a few minutes he realized my boys were professionals and that he was just an ordinary homemade player, and quit.

Then I ran in and z-zh-ip I jumped in the air and sailed the

ball back across the net. I really was very good, so I never understood why I sprained this ligament that day on the beach.

Nevertheless, I most certainly did, and this marked the beginning of my friendship with William Dieterle, the very famous movie director, and his wife Charlotte, who everybody calls Charlie, and her mother, Mutzi. I met Charlie the afternoon I spoke in the Hollywood Bowl. She and a committee came to take me to a shipyard where I christened a boat and I liked her very, very much.

When she heard I had strained this one, she came to the hotel and she bathed me, she cooked for me, she made my laundry—and I just accept all this like it was an ordinary thing for her to do. But after a few days, when she took me from the hotel and brought me to her house and I saw the butler and the cook, I was touched as can be that she, who never had to do anything, made all these things for me personally.

Even when my leg is healed and I go up and down in the West speaking, I come back to the Dieterles whenever I have a few days free. Always they meet me at the bus or train and treat me like a member of the family. Dieterle even painted my room himself and Charlie said it cost him a lot because he spoiled a beautiful linen suit.

It was good to have two such friends for sometimes I had as unpleasant experiences as can be. The very first speech I made after I could move about was at a huge luncheon in Los Angeles. The mayor of the city was there, a Mr. Brown, the Russian Soviet consul, Mr. Postoyev, and the English and Chinese consuls and Leopold Stokowski—just everybody was there. When I finished speaking, the Russian consul came up to me and said, "You, of course, are no longer a Russian, but you were a Russian once and I am ashamed of you. There is no dignity in your speeches. You describe the Russians as so poor, so in need, you make the Americans think Russia is a beggar nation. Shame on you!"

I was terribly upset, but Charlie said to me, "Nila, pay no attention. He is just a party-line bureaucrat."

It really saved my life to be with the Dieterles after such an unpleasant encounter. Charlie has the real gift for the strong, family life for she makes every day a holiday. She has breakfast on the terrace, she works with pleasure in the garden, she picks and arranges the flowers in the house. I tell you, my soul rests in this house with this individual taste; but what I like best of everything is to spray with water the flowers and grass for everything then smells so beautiful.

Dieterle's chief interest, of course, are the movies. One evening he took me to the Hollywood première of *Since You Went Away* and what impressed me most was how all the stars was trying to wear as little as possible as they go through the long corridor with everybody straining to see who is there. Can imagine, the crowd was standing all the time while we watch the picture just so they can look once more at the stars as they go out.

The voice on the loud-speaker shout, "The car for Mr. Charles Boyer," and while Mr. Boyer is waiting there, the woman are swaying and groaning from the happiness of seeing the first lover of the screen with the half-closed eyes.

I tell you frankly I didn't understand about the star system. Before I went to the Dieterles to stay, my hotel was next to this Chinese movie where the stars come and press their feet and hands in the soft cement, and where the people come all day to see these things. It's as ridiculous as can be. The woman stars never come with the flat soles, but come with the highest heels possible, and so the prints of their feet look like little horseshoes. Here are these little round horseshoe things and away off here, as if they had nothing to do with them, the small dots that are the press of the heels.

One evening I put on my speaking shoes and tried my feet

in these prints and, believe it or not, they easily fit many of them, though I wear size nine.

I watched Gary Cooper, who had just finished *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, put his huge feet in this cement. There were thousands who watched him. All the traffic even stopped.

The same way, I couldn't understand the craze for autographs. One day a girl with this fever asked me for my autograph and when I said, "Certainly," she turned around and my God! on the back of her raincoat all the names were written. Can imagine?

Now comes the trouble. My left arm was paralyzing and after the doctors look they say it's my teeth. Who could believe there was a connection between my teeth and my dead arm; yet, the doctors say the teeth are poisoning all my nerves.

The poor Dieterles, what they went through. For every tooth pulled they prepared a present and what presents! A box of chocolates, some gloves, a small green hat with the veil, a black suit with the little white stripes from Valentina, and finally, in honor being freed from the last tooth that must come out, a pair of the most beautiful lounging pajamas. For me this pajamas was only for the Tsarina or a woman who was absolutely ravishing. The pants were long and there was a coat that is tight at the waist and comes to the calves of the legs. With some kind of shoo-shoo stuff around the tail that made it stand out and swish when you walk. It is fancy as can be. It is like you see nowhere except in the movies. And there were slippers to match.

That night Charlie put me to bed and gave me some medicine to make me sleep, but at two o'clock in the morning I waked up and my face was swelled out. So I got up and put on the pajamas and swoon up and down for one hour in front of the mirror. I never looked at my face; I just admired my figure.

They came in very handy, these pajamas, a little later. I

went to Des Moines, Iowa, to speak and was invited to stay with Mrs. Grover Hubbell, who was very rich and very honorary with Russian War Relief. She was just presiding and such things. The house is huge like an English house with floors and floors on a hill and with gardens all around. It even has a gallery with the deer heads that the . . . the . . . are the ancestors in the back or the front of you? . . . O.K. . . . the deers that the ancestors have killed.

I was brought there quite late and Mrs. Hubbell, very elegant to the last twinch, had on a very beautiful black afternoon dress, with an orchid on her shoulder. She showed me to a whole wing with a bathroom the size of a sun porch. Then she asked me would I like to have my breakfast in bed or would I like to join her and Mr. Hubbell downstairs, and I say I will join her and Mr. Hubbell.

Then she left and I heard her breathlessly calling up her friends and saying, "My dear, she doesn't look so terribly like a Russian. She doesn't even wear a scarf over her head."

So the next morning I get up and I put on the Dieterles' pajamas and then I take my hair and put it down over one side of my forehead and one eye like Veronica Lake, who is such a hero at this time. I read in the papers that the United States government appealed to Veronica Lake to change her hair-do. It seems so many girls in the factories were making the same hair-do that there were many accidents in the machinery. So the government begged her to change it. When I read it, it amused me beyond everything. I was laughing as can be. . . . Well, I put this Veronica Lake tail over my face and I take a big, chiffon handkerchief with the tips of my thumb and third finger and hold it away from me like it smells bad and I come to the dining room to join the Hubbells. Never was Veronica Lake as much like Veronica Lake as I was at that moment.

If you could only have seen Mrs. Hubbell when she saw me

sweeping in with this tail of hair and in these fancy pajamas with handkerchief in hand!

Mr. Hubbell, I'm sorry to report, was too busy to show much reaction. He had in front of him one of those especially designed things to hold the newspaper so he doesn't need to hold it himself, and to one side of him a warming thing for the egg, which, of course, has just been born, and on the other side of him a huge stack of mail.

So I sat down and in a few minutes I asked, "Mr. Hubbell, are you rich?"

He made a little laugh, and Mrs. Hubbell looked frightened with the thought that this is the beginning of that wild, Russian woman.

But Mr. Hubbell, he just considered quietly for a minute and then he say, "Yes, I believe I am."

"Then why you rush?" I ask him. "Why you eat and read the paper and attend the mail and do everything together? Why not enjoy the life?"

He, of course, had no satisfactory answer for that one.

In a little while I went to my room to prepare my speech and this time I heard Mrs. Hubbell calling her friends even more breathlessly and saying, "My dear, this morning she doesn't look in the least like a Russian; she looks like Veronica Lake."

16

I Learned about America the Hard Way

As the United States became more involved with the war, I began speaking every day and frequently twice a day. When I saw Americans working so hard I feel I must work too. I feel that this old coat that a woman gives me for Russian War Relief will go to my mother or my sister or my friends.

I go several times to Florida and I must say Florida was a shock to me. You walk on the streets there and everybody is sitting with their heads dropped back limply, their eyes shut and their legs sprawled wide. They seem to be trying to open their flesh just as much as possible. Everybody looks as if she is in a gynecologist's office. It is really something.

Once I spoke at the Knife and Fork club—or is it the Fork and Knife club?—I think it was in Sarasota; and oh! you never saw in your life so many retired, healthy man with the pink cheeks and the quite young-looking old ladies with the jewels.

After the speech there was a reception and we came to the big house, the house that spreads like the ivy, and the ladies retired upstairs to put on the lipstick and exchange notes, and

one elderly lady say, "Girls, I want to tell you about the most wonderful gadget I saw today."

Of course, I got tremendously interested, for as I've already told you, I love all kinds of gadgets.

"Girls, it looks something like a shoe bag that you hang on the closet door, except this is a bag to hang in the bathroom, with pockets to hold the glasses and the newspapers and magazines, and you can get it in all colors.

"And oh-h-h-h, how we need it!" cried one plump lady in lavender, with all the years of constipation written on her face.

Then all the other woman nodded their heads solemnly toward their puffed bosoms.

Another day while I was in Florida it was quite chilly, and I came to a house with a fireplace, and when the hostess went to the kitchen to fix some tea, I thought I would do a service and have a fire on hand when she returned.

The wood was already lying there and all the equipment for the fire. The brass tongs to turn the wood, the poker, the little shovel, the gadget with which you blow the weak, beginning flames, the fence to keep the fire off the rug, the toy broom and even a big, beautiful, copper kettle. Everything possible and impossible for the fire.

So I struck the match—and what do you suppose happened? The smoke came billowing madly out into the room. There was everything there except the chimney!

I also made another terrible mistake in Florida. I stayed in one place in a very rich house, but the walls looked terribly dusty and musty. I mentioned this to the lady of the house—you know, Willie, how frank I am—and she say, "Oh, yes, the walls are very old."

I thought how sad and decided to do what I could to improve them. I got up early the next morning and found a bucket, some rags, soap and water and set to scrubbing. I had done almost one wall and was still in full swing when the lady of the

house appeared and turned pale as a ghost. She told me the whole room had been brought completely from Italy—dirts, cobwebs and everything—and here I am, washing off its antiquity.

In New Orleans I had a shock, too, but entirely different. I came to a big plant where they make the torpedo boats and I got the acquaintance of the owner of the plant, Mr. Andrew Jackson Higgins, and he gave me the chief engineer to show me around.

"Only five months ago," the chief engineer explained, "all this was just a field and now this magnificent plant stand here," and so on and so on, but I wasn't the least interested in anything he said for it was lunch time and every man was sitting on the floor with a lunch box just like the ladies' handbag and was taking out sandwiches and a thermos jug with the little cup screwed on top and a paper napkin. Every workman put the napkin in his lap and opened the thermos and poured the coffee in the top and the steam came up, and then he ate a bite of sandwich and took a drink of coffee.

"This machine here is an American invention," the chief engineer went on, but by this time I wasn't paying any attention to him at all. I was never so impressed in my life at how this lunch looked. Every single man has like this: the box, the thermos, the paper napkin. Here this workman with everything so neat and nice. It's the point that makes the United States so important. It shows the level of the living.

Then a certain happening in Massachusetts surprised me considerably. I was walking along the street in Northampton and I came to a most beautiful park named Childs and, as you can understand, I thought it was a park for many childs to play. Here I saw a very old lady working, clipping the roses, and I stopped to talk to her.

"Are you working by the day or the hour?" I ask her.

She smiled sweetly and say, "Oh, by the hour. I'm too old to work by the day."

Then I ask, "Why you have to work?"

She answer, "Because I like to work," but, of course, I thought she say that to save the face.

"If you want me I'll work with you," I tell her. "I'm staying here a few days between speaking engagements and I can come and help you."

She thank me very much and then she say, "Will you come home with me and have a cup of tea?"

And I think what kind of country is this where a poor woman can stop work and have tea? Nevertheless, I accept and we walk some block together and arrive at a very beautiful house.

"Come in," she say. "Come in."

As, perhaps, you've already guessed, it was Mrs. Childs herself who gave the very beautiful park to Northampton.

I spoke many places in Massachusetts. I even spoke one evening in Boston at a debutante ball. On the evening of this ball I put on my big, black, taffeta silk skirt in the style of the American Revolution and the black blouse and went down in the lobby of the hotel, dragging, my shoulders slumped. I had been speaking twice a day and was very tired. Besides I thought it will be just another party where everybody want to know about the situation and I'm so fed with the situation I could cut my throat.

However, in the lobby are two young boys with white ties, long tails, white gloves and blue ribbons across their chests, and I straighten myself immediately. Without the wink of an eye, I accept these blue ribbons, these white gloves and white ties and I sweep across the lobby, my head in the air and my revolutionary skirt swirling and sweeping beautifully. Everybody in the lobby was just frozen, they were so impressed.

So we came to the ball and it was the fanciest thing as can

be. Every boy and every man was in the white tie and not only was he wearing the white tie that night, but you could see he had always been wearing the white tie and that hundreds behind him had been wearing it. Of course, that's the only time the white tie and tails belong to be worn.

And my, my, all this chiffon! The girls were in these yards and yards of chiffon and long gloves, but still they were half-naked. I think they must have put glue on their points to keep up their fronts.

They must have taken me for the aunt of the Tsar for all of them made curtsies to me. I almost blessed them. And all the man broke on me, which I didn't care for at all. I wanted just one good man who would dance with me hard and long. Nevertheless, I stayed until four o'clock in the morning. I spoke at supper and when I finished the host say, "I understand Madam Magidoff is very tired, so we will excuse her if she feels she must leave us now." But not at all! Madam was having a time!

I remember I asked every man who danced with me the same question: "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" I had only recently begun to understand that there were two parties in the United States. This amazed me so much that I asked everybody, even when I was buying the stockings or registering at a hotel, "Are you a Republican or a Democrat?" I wasn't really interested in the answer, but I felt such a pleasure in the freedom to ask such a question and in the knowledge that the person has the freedom to answer it.

Here at this debutante ball was the chance on the wholesale scale. "To which party you belong?" I asked, and one young man answered, "The right to belong to the Republican party comes with the fortune. My great grandpapa, my grandpapa and my papa belonged to the Republican party, so, of course, I belong."

As you well know, the word *democratic* can stand for a lot of

things besides the Democratic party, and it interested me very much how people used it.

Once I went to Winnetka near Chicago and I visited there a Mrs. Moore, whose house has the smell of a house that stays rich for a long time with many maids running and with guest rooms matching nicely. You know the kind of house that always has the wonderful soap and the powder in three colors, depending upon the complexion of the guest. Even in the closet a robe hanging for the guest who has no robe.

Well, from Winnetka I had to go frequently to Chicago where I was often speaking and always Mrs. Moore and I go in the car with the chauffeur. You get in and he covers your legs with the rug that just gives you the warmth and weighs nothing and then, when you arrive to the destination, you stay right there until he runs around and opens the door.

"How does Mr. Moore get to Chicago," I asked Mrs. Moore one morning, "when we always are using the chauffeur?"

"Oh, my dear," she answered, "Mr. Moore is so democratic he drives himself."

Just at that moment a long, light-colored, two-seat sports car z-zh-ip alongside of us and here was the "so democratic" Mr. Moore, driving himself.

I go on and on speaking. One tour that is especially vivid even now was through Missouri, Kansas and Texas in the middle of the summer. I think it began in St. Louis though I didn't speak there. I visited with the members of the committee of Russian War Relief and I told them I wanted to take a trip on the Mississippi in a slow boat with wheels turning like in the time of Mark Twain, but what I got was a ticket on a monstrous thing with 5,000 people, and everywhere you look juke boxes blaring and bars with the shaking cocktails.

It was just bedlam. It was the most atrocious thing; not a trace of Mark Twain. So I turned to the committee and announced, "I'm not going on this boat!"

They say, "What do you expect?"

"Anything," I say, "but not *that*! I think it is sacrilegious to the memory of Mark Twain to go on this excursion boat on the beautiful Mississippi."

And with that speech, I walked off.

However, there were two things in St. Louis that I liked very much—the open air tee-ater and the zoo. The open air tee-ater where they have the light opera has a very beautiful view. When I go there I was really in peace and much impressed at the way the people sit there so quietly in the open air under the stars and listen to the music. Especially after that boat. My God!

The zoo was wonderful too. I never miss a zoo in whatever town I come to; the monkeys and the bears behave just the same all over the world and make you forget national boundaries and customs and ambitions and jealousies.

Next, I went on a very beautiful train to the town of Hannibal where Mark Twain was born and grew up. Three large Southern man, with the slow movements and the low speech, met me and brought me to the Mark Twain Hotel. By the way, everything in Hannibal is the Mark Twain. The cleaner is Mark Twain, the shoe repairer, the movie, everything.

The hotel looked like the oldest hotel in America. When it was built they didn't build the closets. The thing to hang your things on is standing in the middle of the room and on the wall is a huge portrait of Mark Twain. After a few minutes I'm already feeling I'm living with Mark Twain. The food is excellent, very lavish and very cheap. You get a seven-course dinner for one dollar, but don't expect to get that now, for this was some years ago.

The local head of the museum took me sight-seeing, and we go up into the mountain about the town where Mark Twain liked to sit and where now stands a very simple and very noble statue. From here you see the woods and plains and a new, huge

bridge, which is the last word in the technique, but it spoil the view.

Then we go and see the caves along the river where Huckleberry Finn and his friends liked to play, and the guide there with the monotone voice quote page after page from Mark Twain. With all modesty, I could have said it much better.

I still want to go on a boat on the Mississippi and so the next morning I am invited for a ride in a motorboat. Of course I much prefer to lay down on one of those long, floating barges that *put . . . put . . . put . . .* but I have no choice. The boat has a very strong motor and the driver, though he has no front teeth, still managed to chew the chewing gum. When I first see him I smell he belong to the people in every port who are not afraid of God or devil—we call 'em in Russia the "sea wolves"—and I decide even if it is the last hour of my life I will not show him I am afraid.

With the speed of forty miles an hour, he goes right at the bridge; then makes a quick right-angle turn. He does all the tricks possible—all the deadly tricks. He rocks the boat; he goes z-zh-ip through the rough waves of other boats and, though I am afraid to death, I sit with my arms crossed, my back stiff, face set.

When he finishes he says, "Yes?" moving his gum from one jaw to the other, and I say, "Yes." There is no need to say more; we understand each other.

As I am leaving the hotel next day to go to the station, which is not far, there is no taxi, so two Negro boys, the two blackest I ever saw, take my suitcase and while we wait for the train to arrive they ask me to say something in Russian and, so, I recite them Pushkin and Mayakovsky. One of the Negroes who is small, with a white jacket much too large for him, and a huge cap with the sign of the hotel on the front of it, is enjoying the poetry especially and begins to dance to the rhythm of it and,

of course, his dancing influences my reciting and by the time the performance is over I'm not reciting Pushkin but singing Boogie Woogie.

The Negro tells me his dream is to travel everywhere in the world and speak every language where he travels. So I ask him how far he has gone with the languages and he answer in his deep, Southern drawl, "Ang-lish."

Then five or six people came up and asked my autograph. That impressed my two friends tremendously and they cry, "Write in Russian! Write in Russian!" They act as proud as if they are giving the autograph themselves. The taller boy say dreamily, "I wonder what would happen if somebody would ask an autograph of me."

Some days later I spoke in a low-ceilinged room in the YWCA in St. Joseph with the thermometer over 100. I told the people about the Red Army and how they suffered in the Russian winters in frost and snow, but I admitted I didn't know who suffered most, the Red Army or the people of Missouri from this heat.

After the speech I was wet in all the places you are supposed to be wet, but also across the back and behind my knees and down my legs. I had a feeling I was put all over with hot compresses.

That same afternoon I took a bus, a very hot, dusty, crowded bus to Kansas City. In front of me a soldier told very loudly about the battles in Germany, but everybody was too hot and tired to be interested, except one old man who asked what kind of ice cream did they have in Germany and what churches the people belonged to—the Baptists or the Methodists. Also behind me were two soldiers studying their Austrian money. In fact the bus was filled with soldiers and hot as it was, they did not smell.

You know, it surprised me very much the first time I realized the American soldier didn't smell. It was shortly after the war

started and I was walking down a street in Florida and I saw a group of soldiers marching toward me and when they got close I took a long, deep breath and nothing happened. There was no smell at all. I was shocked as can be. In Moscow the soldiers have such a distinct smell. Like the taste of chocolate you can't describe it; you just know it. They eat heavily and their stomachs work nicely and when they walk they leave behind them this smell of well-digested, substantial food.

But smell or no smell, I was fed up with this bus, and I thought to myself what I would give to sit on some farm and dig in the ground and plant tomatoes and onions.

Look what a life! I came to Kansas City after dark, had a press conference, and then spoke at a big meeting at the university. Everybody connected with the meeting was in Russian costumes: the arrangement committee, the singers, the dancers, everybody except me. I was in the black evening dress. The man who introduced me was, I believe, a banker, for he was so clean, so sleek, so well-settled, and with no imagination.

I liked Kansas City very much. Here, I felt, was real America. There was so much green everywhere, with beautiful boulevards and gardens, and game places for the children and everything for sport. I liked, too, the pride the citizens feel in the city. They kept asking me how I liked it. Their main pride, they told me, was their newspaper, for it was published without sensational headlines. Only when something important happens like Pearl Harbor do they use the big headlines and even then they are more modest than in New York and Chicago.

Next, I'm on the way to Houston, Texas, and there the air was so thick that when you walk on the street you have the feeling you're swimming and must push it aside. I learned about America the hard way; but I wanted to learn the life.

I went to dinner in Houston in the club for the people with oil in their back yards and I sat next to some oil magnate who was very disappointed that I knew nothing of oil in Russia.

However, he and all the other guests asked so many questions about communism, Stalin and the situation in general, they had no time whatsoever to talk about Texas. A most unusual situation, I'm sure, in Texas.

This wasn't my only trip to Texas. I went another time with R. H. Knickerbocker, the foreign correspondent, to sell War Bonds. We went many places and at last we came to a place near Houston . . . what was its name? . . . I remember it ended with a "will" . . . . Maybe Brownsville, or maybe Gainesville . . . I don't remember now, but anyway, it was close enough to Houston to go even in the wartime by car.

Here we were scheduled at a rodeo. When I saw these cowboys with the beautiful control of their muscles and body, I was absolutely fascinated. How they walk so graceful and full of dignity. And how they jump on the wild horses and ride them! For weeks afterwards I tried to walk like these cowboys and to yodel. Every night in the quietness of my room I was trying to achieve these accomplishments, but to my everlasting shame I never do it.

Indeed, at the rodeo I was so fascinated I completely forgot I was supposed to speak until the chairman called my name twice, and then I got up and just talked on and on, floating away. You know how you can float away sometimes on the beautiful sound of your own voice?

Among other things I say if I be free to be what I please I'll be this cowboy. I say I watch with such a love and such an admiration that if somebody will buy a War Bond for $100,000. I will ride this wild horse myself. I forgot completely I was in Texas.

The next minute a man with a check in his hand walked up and said, "Go ahead."

I looked at the check and it was for $100,000.

My God! What to do? My mind raced like a mad and I said, "O.K., I will ride like I promised, but if I ride now I'll never be

able to sell any more War Bonds. You'd better let me come back after the war." The man agreed; but so far I've been too clever to go back.

Seriously, though, I'd like to go back. Not to ride this wild horse, you understand, but to see Texas. In the war I had the feeling that Texans got rich so quickly they had no time to develop the taste. When they struck the oil they didn't build houses like they want, but brought them from Italy or Mexico or bought them whole from the newspapers or magazines. One evening I was at a home that was so absolutely standard, with everything built from the advertising pages, I found it hard to believe that warm, alive people lived there. By now I'm sure they build what they want and they want nice, individual things. Money gives the leisure for study and travel and is so helpful to develop the good taste.

17

In Russia They Wouldn't Believe It

I CONTINUED to travel all over the country, speaking, and my God! the people just sucked me and sucked me. Never in my life was I so tired, so empty, so lonely as I was then, for I gave all I had and had no time to receive anything back. Also, I was always in front of people. I often ate three meals a day sitting on the platform, people asking me questions. I don't feel like a human being who loves and is loved, but like an animal in a zoo, going up and down, up and down, and frequently I act like an animal too.

Also, my back began to hurt me a lot. This was due largely, I suppose, to the years of tense and strain of my Russian life; but of course, all the traveling and standing on my feet didn't help any. Once it got so bad I had to go to the hospital. Then once I doctored it myself. I remembered how we treated our aching backs in the villages in Russia and I decided to do likewise in New York.

I needed vodka for the real Russian treatment, but I couldn't get vodka, so I bought a fifth of gin. I remember the man looked with sorrow in his face when I bought it. I warmed it a little bit and added black pepper and the red pepper that you cut with the knife and then I shook it hardly.

Next, I warmed my two fox furs—in Russia they take sheep fur, but I had no sheep fur—and turned them around my aching place, pinned them with big safety pins, got in the bed and drank down the gin.

Oh! you go in flames! You know exactly what hell is. You're not drunk because you're more than drunk. You're hot inside and outside; you're cooking completely. But it cured me beautifully for that time.

Then it was I came to Louisville. You met me, Willie, and brought me here to Prospect. The house was full of yellow flowers—jonquils, I believe—and that evening we went to a dinner where there was such a collection of elderly woman and elderly man. Do you remember what a collection it was? There was so much furniture and all the walls were full of portraits of . . . of ancestors and of pictures painted by artists of the last century. The dinner was very, very tasty, but a woman dressed in green with gold spots, who sat across the table, spoiled it for me completely; she talked all the time how she hated Mr. Roosevelt.

Do you remember, Willie, how in the middle of the dinner you got everybody quiet so I could tell the incident on the train about mistaking the salt for the sugar, which I told you on the way to Prospect, and how I said, "No, I will not! Like Shakespeare, I never repeat myself."

And you begged, "Oh, please do, Nila! Nobody here, except me, has heard it and I'd love to hear it again. It's so amusing."

Again with the Russian stubbornness, I said, "No, I will not. I never, never repeat myself."

Then with everybody leaning forward in their chairs and waiting patiently with the expectant eyes you said in the animated voice, "Well, then, if you don't mind, Nila, I will tell it."

But before you could tell one word, the woman in green with the gold spots broke in firmly, "No, you won't! You talk all the time."

After dinner the host sat on a stool in front of a very small organ and Mark Estridge led the singing with such an abundance that it took all your power to drag him away. To watch him was as ridiculous as can be. He didn't sing at all; he just opened his mouth like sounds must come, but no sounds came.

Then we went to a party at the River Valley Club that followed the concert of Grace Moore. At the beginning everything was like the usual American party; everybody stand and hold the glass with the melting ice that change the color and strength of the drink. Then you and I decided to organize the dancing.

Somebody—I think it was Wilson Wyatt, who was the mayor then—came up and said to me that he had been expecting from the publicity in the paper to see a strong, blue-stockinged woman who always talk the propaganda, but he never expected to see a woman who do the conga.

For the first time in all my speaking, there were people in Louisville who understand I didn't want to talk the situation. Mary Sand and Warwick Anderson helped me write a poster:

One question on Russian situation.....$1.00
One question on German situation.....50 cents
One question on Japanese situation.....25 cents

"But why," Warwick ask, "the question on Japan so cheap?"

"Because," I say, "I don't know anything about Japan."

We came home at five o'clock in the morning with our shoes off and all my diseases were "gone with the wind" and you agreed with me with a full heart that dancing was the best cure for any illness.

Remember, you Estridges had then two horses and a goat and the goat lived in the stable and was very friendly with the horses. The next morning all three of them ran away; somebody had left the gate open. You asked Mark to catch them and for two hours he chased all over the place behind them,

repeating again and again, "God damn! God damn!" It was the first time I learned that expressive expression.

It was funny beyond words how those two horses ran, then the goat, and then Mark, and then little David, who was just about six years old, and then myself behind all five.

The next evening when we were dressing for a dinner—and oh, right here, put that people in Louisville dress for a reason or no reason and I had with me only one long black dress—a cable came from Robert in Cairo, Egypt, saying, "DARLING, I LOVE YOU." I was so pleased for I didn't know where he is, that I burst out to the telephone operator, "I thank you, I kiss you, you are wonderful," and very quietly, she answered, "You are welcome."

As we dressed, David ran from one room to the other, noisily admiring our dresses and I remember he said to you "Muh-muh, you look so beautiful," and for some reason it made the tears come into my eyes.

I was ready the first one and David escorted me downstairs. We studied the globe, and Cairo looked so close that David asked me, "Can't Robert come for dinner?" Then we found the small city in India where Mark, Jr. was with the English army, and then we talked about many things and everything I told David he answered, "I know it."

Finally, everybody was dressed and Mark brought the car and we departed, gathering up our big skirts.

We went to dinner at the Barry Binghams' and I was impressed as can be at the hugeness of the entrance hall with graceful, wide steps, directly in the middle, leading to the upstairs, and big, white bear rugs on the floor, and pear blossoms in full bloom in tall vases.

Barry, you remember, was not at home; he was in the war in England and so Mary acted as both host and hostess. I thought her very charming, a beautiful blonde, with such a reserved elegance, and yet, in spite of this reserve, such a sincere, enthusi-

astic interest in everybody. She asked intelligent questions and when she asked, she was really concerned to know. She listened with double attention.

From the hall we went into a large room on the left and everywhere here were also fresh flowers and a fireplace that worked. While everybody was drinking whatever he liked, two of the children, Sally and Jonathan, came in to spend a little while with the guests. I noticed how suddenly Mary, so straight, so reserved, with the elegantly born manners, softened in every way—even her shoulders relaxed—when the children appeared.

Sally, I remember, was wearing a Chinese silk robe, but I don't remember what Jonathan was wearing for I was too fascinated by the . . . the . . . the freckles on his face and his very good, blue eyes.

Dinner was for twelve and the service was so quick and noiseless—much more efficient than at your house—but the conversation, as usual, was all about the situation. Some of the guests besides Mark were newspaper people and they were very interested that every Russian newspaper has a department of complaint; but, of course, I pointed out to them that all the satisfaction that the people who write the complaint got was that they wrote the complaint.

After dinner man and woman separated, which was new to me, and they spent a whole hour separated. The woman went upstairs to a large, wide bedroom where also there was a fireplace burning and they talked so excitedly about little, unimportant things that I asked them if there is a time when they are bored with life. Mary, after thinking very seriously, answered me that she didn't remember ever being bored.

The next day was raining and snowing and we decided to stay at home and for two hours you read to David and me *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Do you remember? Then Mark came home and we played cards and I was very afraid Mark

will get the stroke for he plays the game so seriously. I even did a little cheating to keep from winning, but still I win.

Then, after more parties, the days came for the speeches. I spoke one noon to the Kiwanians, which like the poor Rotarians, has no control over what they hear—the program chairman invites and here they are. Then one Sunday afternoon I spoke to all people in a downtown church; then I went on many radio programs. One day I was on a special woman's broadcast and the whole program, can imagine, was devoted to slacks and femininity and I very savagely attacked the slacks until I saw suddenly in the eyes of the woman interviewer that she wear them all the time.

I traveled too about the state. I spoke one night at the University of Kentucky in Lexington and at some hour of the day or night at Lebanon and Paducah and Hopkinsville. And I had the most interesting traveling companion going to Hopkinsville: a grown-up boy who was just eight years old. His mama put him on the train alone and for me this was a shocking thing. I can't believe a mother will put a child like this on the train to travel by himself. In Russia the mother will never trust a child to be alone, not even so reasonable a child as this one.

He had a big watch and every five minutes he looked at it and then studied the timetable. He knows exactly where to look and what the station will be next and what time the train is supposed to be there.

When he finds out I was a Russian he say, "Ah, the Red Army is doing a wonderful job." Then we talk about Japan and Germany and then he ask did I mind if he correct my English. I tell you I was never so conscious of my poor manners and English.

Finally, though, he got tired and he pushed the button and ask the porter for a pillow. Then he ask me politely, "Do you

mind if I take a little rest?" When he waked up he look at his watch, look at the timetable and say, "We are only three minutes late. For the wartime it is excellent."

In Hopkinsville I saw peaches that give only the bloom. They are not planted for the necessity of food, but just for the pleasure of something lovely to see and so they bloom lavishly from a deep red to a pale pink.

My last speech in Kentucky that visit was for David's school. He invited me to come, and the only time it could be arranged was just before my train was leaving. I was never so nervous about a speech in my life. "Will the children," I asked David, "be able to understand my English?"

"Don't you worry, Nila," he said, "there is a girl in my class who talks even worse English than you and she is from Kentucky."

So I went and the whole school was gathered in the gymnasium. David introduces me and then he sits down on the floor on his crossed legs and has nothing to do with me—nothing. He turns his back on me and shrugs his shoulders at his friends to show them he's seen me every day and is completely bored with me. He acts like he's at the peak of his popularity and doesn't listen to one word.

Then I left Louisville, but you and Mark ask me to come back for Christmas. You invited me not for speech, not for broadcast, not for nothing; you just wanted me for Christmas. It was my first real Christmas in America and what an impression it made on me. I was in America at Christmas before but I didn't really know anything about it for I was not in a home with the family.

This time I took a calendar and every night I marked off one day and finally the time arrived and I came. What happy, happy days! All the children were home except Mark, Jr., who was still in India. Mary Snow was home from Duke and Georgia was home from Vassar.

Christmas Eve the whole family decorated the Christmas tree and nobody in the family feels it is Christmas without this worn-out, bedraggled, faded angel that is at least a quarter of a century old and must be on top of the tree. Then as the family ties on the blue and green and red balls and tosses up the silver things, everybody sings the carols. Then there is oyster stew and crackers and dill pickles and eggnog and fruit cake.

Then before going to bed you make it very clear that next morning nobody must get up before eight o'clock, but when it is still dark, David runs like a mad through the hall, ringing a bell and screaming, "Everybody up! Everybody up!"

We all come into your and Mark's room and the stockings are hanging on the mantel with the packages piled beneath them. Everybody pounces on them and immediately everything is involved. Mary Snow is trying on a dress on top of her nightgown and pinning a pin on the shoulders and Georgia is putting on a blouse and a sweater and a scarf and David is pulling on boots and gloves and pushing a slide and everybody is shouting, "Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!" and nobody looks at anybody except his own self.

Then there is breakfast in the big dining room and then the Christmas tree and once again everything is in full swing. "This is my corner," David cries, claiming the biggest cleared space in the room. There are presents from everybody except from you and Mark to the children, which, of course, they've already got upstairs. From the children, from your mother and from your brothers and sisters-in-law and from Mark's sisters and brothers-in-law and from friends and friends-in-law. From everybody. I never saw anything like it. So much giving! In Russia they wouldn't believe it.

Then the beautiful days after Christmas. It snowed a lot, remember, and for hours and hours we devoted ourselves to learning to dance the jitterbug. There came this English girl to see Georgia . . . Diana something . . . her father was Lord Mayor

of London . . . Diana Latham . . . and she hasn't a stiff English bone in her body. And going on the machine all the time was our most beloved song, "Her Tears Flowed like Wine." We ate breakfast to "Her Tears Flowed like Wine." We ate lunch to "Her Tears Flowed like Wine" and if we were at home at dinner, we ate dinner to "Her Tears Flowed like Wine." So the jitterbug came to the family. Only Mark kept his sanity.

I felt I accomplished it quite well; much better, in fact, than you, Willie. Evidently your soul didn't agree to the rhythm, but when I danced it, every bone in my body was in rhythm, not only my feet and my legs, but every bone, even my hair. I remember I wanted to find out the background of the jitterbug. I felt if I ever returned to Russia I wanted to explain the theory behind the jitterbug, but no one could throw any light on this subject.

Then one afternoon I gave everybody a massage. Once when I was in Hollywood I was staying in the fanciest hotel, the Arrowhead Spring, and I developed the big friendship with the masseuse of Dorothy Lamour and other movie stars and she taught me how to give the massage, so I lined up you and Georgia and Mary Snow, and made one of the most impressive speeches of my life on womanhood and how to keep the beauty. Then I began with Georgia, who couldn't have been more than seventeen at the time. I put a sheet around her and then I tied all her hair tight into a little knot on the top of her head and then I began to massage her face, which was just as smooth as an egg, explaining how the massage must proceed the same way as the lines, though, of course, the lines on Georgia were completely nonexistent.

"The lines will go on and deepen," I told her very seriously, "unless you massage them like this every single night."

When everybody was massaged, I showed how to relax the face by opening the mouth, and for many minutes—fifteen at

least—we all sat about with our mouths dropped open to keep our beauty going on.

Then there was the day we had lunch—just you and Mary Snow and Georgia and I—David must have been spending the day with one of his friends. Now I don't know whether Georgia and Mary Snow planned it before or not, but just as we sat down at the table, Georgia said meaningfully, but with the innocent face, "Mother, do you know what courses I'm taking at Vassar?"

And you began to stammer: "Er . . . er . . . English literature, French, music appreciation, er . . . er . . . psychology . . ."

"No," said Georgia. "I knew you didn't know and, Mother, aren't you ashamed? Every other mother knows what her daughter is taking. Can you imagine Mrs. Blakely not knowing what Mary Lee is taking? Or Mrs. Bruce not knowing what Mary is taking?" And then she named somebody else and somebody else.

Then Mary Snow began to ask did you know what courses she was taking at Duke. And when you didn't, she carried on even more worse than Georgia.

At first you tried to defend yourself. You said you had worked hard with them in high school and been very interested in everything they took and everything they did; but now that they were in college, you had confidence in them choosing their own subjects and had not tried to keep up with them.

This, though, didn't satisfy Georgia and Mary Snow. They went on and on and on.

Then, to save your face you began to cry and rushed upstairs to your room. And I rushed right after you. "Willie, pay no attention to them," I said. "They talk ugly as can be. They are really mean and base."

Then that afternoon, came two dozen beautiful red roses and a card that say, "To Mother. She may not know our courses, but we love her just the same."

And oh, the long tramps in the snow through the woods. David and I, especially, went all over the country to discover new lands. It was our best game and I don't remember who played it more earnestly, David or I. We would discover new lands and we would pick up sticks for flags and name the lands for ourselves.

Then in the evenings Mark was reading to us. Those were the blessed days when there was no Wild West warring and no Dragnet business on television. The fire would be burning and the children would sit around on the floor and Mark would read the Bible or "John Brown's Body" and I would look at his eyes and see he was not reading, but saying it by heart.

Yah, those memories are still fresh in my mind.

18

My Friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt

I'D LIKE to tell you now about my friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt. It began soon after I came to the United States, but I've waited until now to tell you about it because one of the most interesting things in connection with it happened very near the end of the war, and also because the friendship is going on to this very moment.

On one of my early speaking tours I was in Phoenix, Arizona. Anna, the daughter of President and Mrs. Roosevelt, was working on the paper there and she came to see me for an interview. I despise interviews, but we started talking and I liked her immediately. She's very tall and has beautiful and quite small feet, which I couldn't keep my eyes off. Finally I said, "What lovely feet you have," and if she had got the compliment from a man, she wouldn't be more pleased.

We talked and talked and when it was time for the speaking and she got up to leave she said, "You must meet Mother. You will like each other."

Of course I said I would like to know her very much, but I knew how terribly busy she was.

"Anyway, I will write her," Anna said.

So one day when I returned to New York my landlord, very excited, told me, "Mrs. Magidoff, you have a letter from the White House." When I opened it there was a note from Mrs. Roosevelt saying she hopes I'll come to lunch. You will never know how impressed I was with the "hopes." I didn't know it was a form and I couldn't understand why she "hopes," for of course I'll come. It says, too, I must answer to the social secretary of the White House. Can imagine? As fancy as that! The social secretary of the White House!

I went with this invitation to the office of the Russian War Relief and the whole office is choosing the form how to write to the social secretary of the White House. They couldn't decide whether I'll be "happy" or "glad" to accept. Then when the form is chosen, everybody starts to work with abandon on what I will wear. It is in the spring when I get this invitation and the famous Japanese cherries are in blossom. Everybody agrees that it is fairly warm in Washington and so I must wear a suit; but must it be light or heavy, black or navy blue, or pastel colored? For almost an hour we discuss it and me more than anybody. Then I said with finality it will have to be a navy blue suit for that's the only suit I have; but nobody cared then, for we already had the pleasure of the discussion.

Next, we began to discuss hat and gloves and, after I got the whole benefit of this discussion, I told them America is a democratic country and I will wear no hat except my regular beret and no gloves. Everybody was so shocked, they avoid my eyes.

The day before the luncheon I spoke in Watertown, New York. I came by bus from there to Washington and went to the Statler Hotel to wash and change my clothes.

I had never been in Washington before so when I was ready I took a taxi and said to the driver, "White House, please." We proceed and arrive almost immediately to the White House. The Statler is just a block or two away. This, as you can understand, made me furious.

"Why didn't you tell me I can walk to the White House?" I asked the driver. "It's the war and you spend gas on me to drive me this short distance. I will pay you thirty cents and not one penny more."

While I say all this a Negro in the tails and brass buttons, who had rushed down the White House steps, holds the taxi door open like he is made of the black marble.

Then I proceed into the hall of the White House and there is another man standing. I give him my raincoat, which I had worn folded over one shoulder, and then z-zh-ip! I snatch off my beret and give him that.

Then I go to the Red Room. When I come there my first impulse is to turn around and go back to New York, for it is full of woman with the fanciest hats and handbags, going "terterterterter." I had thought from the minute I got the invitation there would be only Mrs. Roosevelt and me for lunch, and instead here are woman, whom I decide from their pictures in the papers, are Mrs. Henry Morgenthau and Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Stimson and others like that. So I'm bitterly disappointed. And you know me, Willie, I don't try to hide my feelings. I don't mingle at all with the crowd, but just look around in the bored way.

Then Mrs. Roosevelt comes to the room in a green dress.

"How-dy do?" she says. "How-dy do? Howdy-do?"

When she reaches me she says, "And you must be Mrs. Magidoff?"

There are no cocktails; no like this luxury.

Just "terterterterter" until a man comes and says, "Lunch is served."

So here we go to the dining room and on the table is so much silver you'll be surprised. The first course is tomato juice and we drink it nicely. Then on a very beautiful huge platter there comes scrambled eggs. Nothing else, just scrambled eggs.

I look at this one and say to Mrs. Roosevelt, "If it's the scrambled eggs, why so many knives and forks?"

And Mrs Roosevelt answers, "No matter how simple the meal, we set the table as if for a dinner."

"But which fork to use?" I say. "I'm not accustomed to so much silver."

"Use any one you like," Mrs. Roosevelt answers.

And the woman still go "terterterterter, blahblahblahblah."

Mrs. Roosevelt is very nice and tries to draw me into the conversation. She asks me do I live in New York and I answer briefly that I do when I have no speaking engagements.

I really was horrid; I was so upset. Now, of course, I would be curious about these fancy ladies; but then I was too busy to come all the way to Washington to have lunch with strangers.

So Mrs. Roosevelt tries and tries. And then she say, "What impress you most in America?"

And I say fresh on the moment, "Whistling."

And she say, "What you mean, 'whistling'?"

So I tell her I had come to Washington three or four hours by bus and I had sat in front of a sailor and, for mile after mile, he whistled *Carmen* and, finally, I had turned and said, "Citizen, you are not alone in the bus and your whistling is going on my nerves."

Immediately the whole bus was divided: one side, pro-whistling; one side, anti-whistling. One woman said she has two sons who are sailors and that this is a free country and everybody does what he wants.

But as I explain to Mrs. Roosevelt, I feel a free country means something else—not the right to do this nonsense business, whistling. I feel a free country means everybody respects everybody's rights, so if a person desires, he can be alone, be quiet.

Mrs. Roosevelt seems very much impressed and the next day

she writes a column with the subject, "Citizen, You're Not Alone."

Now let's see what was for dessert? . . . I really don't remember . . . I think in all sincerity we had only scrambled eggs and they didn't even pass them twice. Just as soon as lunch was over and I said good-by to Mrs. Roosevelt, I ran to the closest drug-soda and got something substantial like a hot dog to hold me down.

After that I saw Mrs. Roosevelt several times. The one day when she knew I was speaking at some big women's club in Washington I received an invitation for lunch, with the regular card enclosed to show the man at the gate, and for a special reason, Willie, which you will understand later, I kept it.

So I came again to the White House and by this time I was almost completely civilized. I had on a real hat with a veil and a beautifully tailored black suit. The luncheon was small, just four of us: Anna and Miss Malvina Thompson, Mrs. Roosevelt and me. We were sitting and talking and I asked Mrs. Roosevelt would she be interested to go to Russia.

She said, "Yes, but I can't go as long as I'm the wife of the President of the United States."

"But the Russians need you to tell them about the people of the United States," I said. "You really must go!" At that I smashed my fist down on the table so hard I broke my watch in many pieces. Quickly, the man in tails came and brushed it up and put it in a box, and I was so involved in the conversation I thought no more about it; but I should have remembered this was a very bad omen.

After the lunch, about 2:45, I left because I wanted to rest a little while before my speech and be at my very best, not only for the woman of Washington, but for Mrs. Roosevelt, who had promised to come hear me.

A few minutes before four o'clock I came to this big hall, but

Mrs. Roosevelt wasn't there. Then four o'clock came and still no Mrs. Roosevelt. Nobody understand it. Then 4:15. Finally, the program chairman said we couldn't wait any longer and I started to speak. However, I was just begun when a man arrived, proceeded to the stage, which was very low, and whispered something to the chairman.

I saw her clap her hand to her cheek and instantly I stopped speaking.

"I am very sorry to interrupt," she said with the shaking voice, "but I have an announcement to make. Ladies, the President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, died two hours ago."

Many of the woman started to cry, but not I. I began immediately to speak about how much heavier was the responsibility of each of us to win the war for democracy, now that this great leader was gone. I sincerely think I made the best speech of my career.

I was the last guest of the White House while Mrs. Roosevelt was the official hostess, and I never went back there. But I saw Mrs. Roosevelt frequently when she moved to her little apartment in New York on Washington Square. I would come there between speaking trips, absolutely exhausted, without even the strength to talk to her, and she would say, "Just sit down—and rest."

Once or twice I asked her could I talk to her in Russian, for it seemed to me at these times I was so weary because I had to speak constantly in English and listen in English, which was usually shouted at me, for people were under the delusion that if they shout I will understand better.

She would look at me with her kind eyes, smile and say, "Do, please."

Though I knew she couldn't understand a word, I would tell her something that was on my mind, maybe about Robert, or about my family, or about some problem with my speaking.

Then suddenly I would find myself crying and embracing her for comfort, my tears wetting her blouse.

She would pat me on the shoulder and say quietly, "Nila, people all over the world are suffering and dying now. You must be strong."

Then I would come to my senses and go back to my apartment and prepare more speeches in English. Oh, the attention and love this woman gave me!

I also visited her several times at Hyde Park. Once in the summer—this was several years later—I spent a long week-end there and the first afternoon I sat just resting and Mrs. Roosevelt appeared in a blue bathing suit and a pair of sneakers, completely unconscious how she looked, and played deck tennis with these rope rings. Three of her small grandchildren were there and one of them—I think he was one of Elliott's children—with no teeth in front, wanted ten cents every time he recovered one of the rings that went outside the court, but Mrs. Roosevelt was very firm with him. "No," she said, "I'll give you only five cents."

Then after she played this tennis for about an hour, she ran gayly over to the pool and z-zh-ip she dived in and swam back and forth a dozen times or more.

Then she dressed and came down into the living room and, as the evening was cool, she went on her knees and made a fire.

I was too draggy to do anything and besides I was again having trouble with my back, but I asked, "Why don't you get one of the servants to make the fire?"

"They are busy in the kitchen," she answered calmly.

Then she just sit there and knit and talk. Then we have dinner, a very delicious dinner—duck and salad and lemon cake. After dinner she read aloud two chapters of a book in proof that had been sent to her by the publishers for her opinion, and then she discussed them with everybody.

After that the conversation switched to family matters.

Anna's son, Buzzy, was there with his recent bride, a very pretty, delicate, blue-blooded-looking person, and they were absorbed in building their life together and they need everything for their apartment. Mrs. Roosevelt promised to go to the attic to see what she can find for them. Then she suggested that maybe they could get some things of Aunt Susie's. Aunt Susie had died recently, she said, and had left a lot of furniture.

From the quick fright in Buzzy's and the bride's faces I could see what kind of furniture Aunt Susie had—the heavy antiques which would not fit their conception of a modern home; but bravely, with the faltering voice, the bride said, "Maybe something for the hall."

When the subject of the furniture was used up, the bride, who wore the most beautifully tailored polka-dot dress, with the wide pleated skirt and long sleeves, and the most exquisite white shoes, began to complain how life is so expensive: the food, the electricity, and above all, the laundry. At the mention of the laundry she rocked her head in her hands and her hair is magnificantly coiffured and her hands perfectly manicured.

"Yes," she mourned with all the expression of a harassed housewife, "the laundry bills are simply ruining us. Why, the way the sheets mount up each week is really frightening. Sheets! Sheets! And still more sheets!"

Mrs. Roosevelt listened as she always listens, very attentive, looking straight at her, and then she said quietly, "Wash your *feet* before you *go* to *bed*."

Breakfast the next morning was at eight o'clock. When I came rushing down, Mrs. Roosevelt was already at the head of the table, looking gay and fresh and neat. She had already swum in the pool, listened to the radio and read the paper to know what was happening in the big world.

Breakfast was friendly and simple and coffee was served in cups so large that Mrs. Roosevelt explained to the question in

my eyes that the President had loved big cups and she kept the tradition. I do believe each cup held four normal cups, but I went on until I finished it. I don't honestly remember I ever in my life left anything in my cup or plate.

This was the beginning for Mrs. Roosevelt of another busy, busy day. I won't tell about this one—no room will be left in the book for other things; but I tell you I watched her as always with amazement and devotion.

19

Only the Woman Survive

FINALLY THE WAR was over, and I wanted very much to go back to Russia. I wanted to see Robert, who was still working for NBC in Moscow and can't come to the United States, and my mother. And I wanted to see Russia. I was positive that Stalin, after all the sacrifices, couldn't afford not to give the Russians what they had been fighting for. Now when fascism is crushed and now when there is this beautiful friendship between Russia and the United States, I sincerely believed that Stalin must allow the people more freedom, more democracy. I want to see this new life in Russia.

I already had my papers as an American citizen and all I needed was a passport with a visa for Russia. I applied for United States citizenship the first or second month I was here and I got my first papers in '43 and my naturalization papers in March '45. So I applied for the visa, but no answer. One month went by, then two, three. I wait and wait and then I received a cable from Robert: "DARLING, DARLING, DARLING, VISA IS GRANTED."

But then there were no boats. There are mines all over the seas and no passenger boats are running; but after many weeks

I managed to get transportation on an American freighter that was going through the Mediterranean and the Black Sea to Constanta, Rumania, for it was bringing some relief for Bulgaria. There were twelve passengers on board, eleven Russians and me.

Immediately when I came to the boat I went to the captain and said, "Can I have some work?"

"What kind of work?" he asked with surprised eyes.

"Any kind of work," I answered. "I was once a sailor in the Russian Merchant Marine."

So he sent me to the boatswain and soon I was painting from top to bottom.

One day, though, one of the Russian passengers said to me, "We know you are an American now, but just the same this work as a common sailor puts a black spot on the womanhood of Russia."

"Pooh!" I say. "What do you think the womanhood of Russia is doing?"

And he say, "What the woman of Russia is doing is on the inside, but what you're doing is in the public eye and you should stop it."

"Nothing doings," I say. "The Americans will respect me much more because I do the work and do it nicely."

Then we came to Constantia, and there all the passengers were boarded on an oil tanker that took the oil from Constantia to Odessa. All twelve of us were put in one room with one toilet with two holes: the smelliest, dirtiest toilet one can imagine. I decided I will hold until I get to Odessa.

What, Willie, are those shiny black things that crawl? Sometimes in kitchens they are . . . yes, that's right, cockroaches. . . . Well, I never saw such black, persistent cockroaches in my whole life. The man slept on the floor and the woman on low benches. At night I look at the sleeping bodies and they look like they're moving, they're so black with these crawling

things. They were going all over them, *ch-ump, ch-ump, ch-ump, ch-ump*. I put cotton in my ears, but still *ch-ump, ch-ump, ch-ump, ch-ump*. So I put my raincoat over me and tied it tight on the top of my head and around my waist. At least, that much of me wasn't moving all the nights.

As we neared Odessa, we were given sheets of paper to write what we have with us, and I must tell you all the Soviet citizens, returning to rich Russia, were carrying radios, children's carriages, bicycles—at least two apiece—motorcycles, refrigerators. Everything. They had trunks and trunks of things. They are writing down for two and a half days and still they are not finished. Personally, I had no troubles. I had only four suitcases.

Then we came to Odessa and the NKVD man came on board to check up on the passengers. At the same time two pipes start to take the oil. At Constantia the tanker was loaded so heavily we were almost sitting in the water, but as the oil was taken, the tanker got higher and higher.

Still the NKVD checked on the luggage. For twenty-six hours they were checking on one dozen people, and by the time they finished all the oil was taken and the tanker was standing as high out of the water as a three-story building. They had to put us in a net and with a machine swing us to the dock. Next they swing the luggage.

Then we came to the hotel. It was the first clean one I ever saw in Russia; it had just been done over. Everything was freshly painted and new covers were on the furniture and new curtains at the windows.

Immediately the returning Soviet citizens became terribly important; they began to act just like diplomats. Then the cockroaches began to run everywhere—from the suitcases, from the radios, from the baby carriages, from the bicycles, from the refrigerators, from the trunks—from everything.

My God! the hotel was in the same position it was before it

was done over and the manager cried with tears. And when I say "cried with tears," I mean it—with tears.

I took all my things and got on a very nice train-car for Moscow. A representative of the American embassy had met me with a ticket, which was one of the hardest things to get in Russia then.

While I was cooling myself one day on the platform, near me was sitting a peasant woman in rags. When I told her I came from America, she look at the blouse I was wearing—it was a blouse that Charlie Dieterle had given me, one of those natural-colored, hand-woven, linen blouses that look like a sack, but which, believe it or not, costs fabulous money and which I had thought would be the very thing for the journey, as it was September and very hot and dusty—and the peasant woman say, "I see America also went through the hardships of war, you with this old sack."

The trip took days and days—five days, at least—and I arrived in Moscow at 4:30 in the morning, nine or ten hours late. Poor Robert! But I feel like I conquest the North Pole.

Robert had the same apartment as when I left and he had decorated it with flowers, which touched me very much. We had breakfast and immediately I wanted to see Moscow and Mother. Robert by now had a Studebaker car, the only one in Moscow, and a chauffeur named Pavel, but this day of my return he was very democratic, like Mr. Moore of Winnetka, and drove me himself. The city at that early hour of the morning was very beautiful and very empty.

At 7:30 we came to our friends, where my mother was visiting, and she was washing the floor. In the Russian way, the clock doesn't matter; the reason for doing the act is what's important.

To see her again was as wonderful as can be and we cried and cried; then ate some more and drank vodka. This time she approved of the way I'm dressed. Here I am with the green hat

with the green veil and the nicely tailored suit; but a little girl from across the street looked at me and burst into tears. She thought if I come from America I would be all in silver.

The Russian's opinion about the life in America is still very peculiar. They put an anti-American play on in Moscow and all the Americans are so rich they play tennis in the evening dresses. My mother didn't understand it either. She ask me did I meet a real American millionaire.

"Yes," I said.

Then she focus her eyes and ask excitedly, "Does he drink cocoa every day?"

That evening Robert and I had dinner with Mr. Averell Harriman, who was then our American ambassador to Russia, and I asked him, "Mr. Ambassador, are you a millionaire?"

For a few seconds he held himself very stiff and looked most embarrassed, then he answered brusquely, "Yes, I am."

Then I explained to him why I asked.

"I never drink cocoa," he said, but the very next morning, he sent his chauffeur to our apartment with a five-pound package of it for my mother. When I gave it to her I didn't tell her he never drink it—I didn't want to shatter her illusion about the beautiful American life.

My mother was visiting these friends just temporarily while Robert tried to arrange for a permanent place for her to stay. It had only been recently that Robert had been able to locate her. When I left for the States in 1941 my mother and father were living with my youngest sister, Zina, in the Ukraine. This sister, I should say now if I haven't already said so, was very different from my bottle-sister, Alexandra. Everything about her was so aristocratic. Her teeth were little and white, her neck was long and her fingers were long. When she grew up, she wore a two and a half shoe. The rest of us were all peasants when you look at us, but she was a small one and everything about her was noble.

"Who is the father?" we would ask Mother, and she in her purity would answer, "God will punish you."

This sister, too, when she finished school in Kursk, went to Leningrad and studied to be an engineer for building modern bread factories, and she was one of the best. She married and had two children, a girl and a boy, and was working as chief engineer on a bread factory in the Ukraine when the Germans invaded Russia.

All during the war I didn't hear anything that happened to my mother and father and sister. As you can understand, I was very anxious about them, especially when the area was occupied by the Germans. I asked Robert will he find out something and he went to the Press Department of the Foreign Ministry and inquired and inquired and inquired, and finally he learned that my brother-in-law had been killed during one of the first battles of the war; that my father and my sister's baby boy had died of starvation, and that my mother and sister and niece had been evacuated to Kazakhstan.

Robert wrote them and got a letter that they, too, were starving. He sent them money and food and then, just about two months before I returned to Moscow, he got permission for them to live in Moscow. He bought a room for them for $2,500, but when they came to register for it, they were told they have no permission to be there, but they were given temporary permission to visit friends.

After I came I found them a room in the suburbs and by December they were settled and my sister was working as engineer in a bread factory. My other sister I never saw again; I only got one letter from her.

As for my brother Nikolai, my mother did not hear one word from him during the whole war, and now that I was back in Moscow she said to me, "Nila, you're so important now," with the real understanding of importance because I am mar-

ried to an American, "please try to find out what has happened to Nikolai."

I asked Robert if he minded if I go and inquire about him and he said no. Then I decided to make a real performance. I know so well the Russian bureaucratic psychology. If I come humble and poor I'll be paid no attention. So I put on my mink jacket and my green hat with the veil and white gloves like I was going to a wedding, at least, and I ask Pavel to put on all the style when we arrive at the building where is located the head management of all the camps of NKVD.

So we came. Pavel jump out the car and open the door. I didn't even touch the blanket. I let Pavel remove it and then I emerge. Then Pavel quickly run and, without looking at the guard standing there, open the door of the building. My God! there was silence when I came into the room! It was like the appearance of Greta Garbo. The men, they all get up.

"I'd like to talk to the head officer," I say, and immediately I am taken to him. Then slowly, finger by finger, I take off my gloves.

There was complete bewilderment on the officer's face. I saw he didn't know how to call me—Comrade? Citizen? Madame?

"I'm the American wife of an American correspondent," I say.

It is like a bomb fall. Here is an American right in the middle of everything. Of course, I wouldn't have dared to go to the NKVD if I hadn't my American passport. I might be foolish, but I'm not that foolish.

I told the man that my brother, Nikolai Ivanovitch, was arrested over ten years ago and nothing had been heard of him since. My mother wrote and wrote where is my brother and no answer.

"I'd like you to find out my brother's whereabouts and inform my mother in the shortest possible time," I said.

The poor man said, "I'm sure there must be some misunderstanding. The answer must have been lost in the mail. I assure you I will let you hear personally right away."

"I'm not the one to let hear," I say. "It is my mother who is sick at heart with worries."

Then I said good-by and queenly disappeared.

Five days later the telephone rang in the apartment and a voice said, "Do you inquire about Nikolai Ivanovitch?"

"Yes," I answer.

"He is well."

"May I say so to my mother?" I ask.

"Your mother will be informed."

But she never get a word. Never. My brother completely disappeared from this life.

So, out of all my family, only the woman survive.

20

My Mother Was a Remarkable Woman

My mother had changed amazingly since I was a little girl. She was always, as I told you, very remarkable. If she had got a chance to be educated, she would be something wonderful.

When I left home the first time to go to Moscow, my brother and sisters left, too, and with all the children gone, Mother and Father moved into an apartment house with ninety residents, near the station. Then things began to happen.

After the Revolution every district in Russia will have courses for the housewife, and so my mother went to school and learned reading and writing and hygiene, though when we were growing up she didn't know the most elementary thing. Then she was chosen superintendent of the apartment house and the people would come to her and say, "Comrade Shevko, we need such and such a repair." Then she would go to the mayor's office and report, for the apartment house, of course, belonged to the government.

This importance of my mother caused my father to suffer for the first time in his life a terrific inferiority complex. You

remember I told you that when I was a child Father would come to supper and not talk, and Mother would have to guess whether he wanted the salt or pepper or vinegar? Well, now he would come to supper and find Mother would be leaving a note, "Soup in the stove," and signed, "Yours, Maria Shevko." Even her letters to me began to be signed, "Your mother, Maria Shevko," with all the bureaucratic lines going under the name.

Nothing would hurt my father so much as his wife become a person who decided the problems of other people. I came home once and found my father didn't call my mother, "Maria," or "Mother," as formerly, but called her, "Superintendent." I also noticed this position change even my mother's way of walking and she developed a passion for talking politics.

Then her house was elected the best on the street and my mother was elected to represent the houses of the whole district. Oh, my father was so angry that my mother was become so important. Sometimes I was afraid he would do something—break a pipe or something—just to have my mother no more a superintendent, but a humble wife. Later, when my father retired from work with a very little pension, they had to move out of the apartment, but Mother always remembered the days of her glory.

She never complained of the life. Never! Never! The closest I ever heard her come to complaining was once she said, "I want to live just one day in comfort before I die."

"What do you mean in comfort?" I asked.

"I'd like to lay in bed all day and eat everything I want."

By now she was already in many wrinkles, for she was sixty-six, and her hands were all crooked with rheumatism and hard work, but she was very good looking. She was small and slim, really a beautiful figure, and she had nice-sized feet and alive, inquiring, wondering eyes. Why she married my father I never understand.

She was always interested in the life; she could really get pleasure from anything. If she will be sick and someone will say there is a place to go, she will get right up and go there. The power and desire to see something will overcome every sickness.

Little things would give such joy to my mother. Only real persons, I sincerely believe, can enjoy the small things. She adored the American fashion show. I would put on my clothes I had bought in the United States and my niece would perform the master of ceremonies like Elsa Maxwell.

"Mrs. Magidoff will now show the cocktail dress," she would say, and my mother would sit wide-eyed as I paraded about in my blue silk taffeta.

Then my niece would say, "Mrs. Magidoff will now show the opera dress," and I will come out in my white lace and look as sad as Saks' mannequins in mink.

Then there came Christmas and I said to my mother and sister and niece, "You're going to have an American Christmas," and they certainly had one and went wild. Absolutely wild. I made packages and tied them with bright ribbons and wrote on them cards, "To Grandmother from Grandchild," and "To Grandchild from Grandmother," and so on and so on. I fixed a present for everybody to give everybody. It was, Willie, exactly like Christmas in Prospect. Just like Christmas all over America.

I spent so much money for everything was very expensive, but Robert was wonderful about it and, anyway, we were well off by now. You see, he had been working in Russia now for almost ten years, at first for the Associated Press and then as chief of the NBC bureau, with all expenses paid and no United States income tax. Also, he was correspondent of the Exchange Telegraph, a British news agency, which paid him in pounds. We used the pounds and saved our American money.

Christmas Eve we decorated the Christmas tree and then I sent my mother, sister and niece into the kitchen while I arranged everything. Then when I had all ready, I dressed up like Santa Claus. I put on a red blanket and my fur jacket and fur hat. Then I went outside and came and knocked on the kitchen door and here they sit in the cold kitchen, covered with the blankets.

"Does Maria Shevko live here?" I ask.

"Yes, yes, yes, she lives here," my mother answered. Oh, she is like a child, she enjoys it so much.

I came and shook hands. "How do you do?" I say.

"Very well," she answer, "and how do you do?"

"I'm Santa Claus," I say, "and I've come to bring you an American Christmas."

Then I go and sit under the tree and hand out the presents. The first one was for Mother—black silk material for a dress. And I go on and on. I even have presents to myself from my mother and my sister and niece and it was really funny as can be to hear my sister say to my mother, "What I gave you?"

And how my mother loved the tee-ater. As I think I already told you, she was a very dramatic person. She adored to act and make pretend. She was simply crazy about The Game. From early morning she build the conversation that in the evening we play The Game and once, I remember, we gave her to act out this card game in Russia, which is like bridge, and she acted it out most earnestly but nobody guessed it, and she was so disappointed she cried. I tell you this just to show you the character.

My sister told me that once when Mother was living with her and her husband in the Ukraine, my mother got her feelings hurt about something and she got up and said, "Good-by. I'm going into the world. I'll never see either one of you again."

She went out and, to frighten them, she got up on the roof of the house. My sister and her husband saw her, but to teach

her a lesson they refused to find her. They came out into the yard and kept asking, "Where is Mother? Where she is?"

Mother, unable to go unnoticed any longer, untied her shoe and dropped it on top of them, but still they refused to notice her and went back into the house. Finally, Mother could stand it no longer and came down off the roof and rejoined my sister and brother as if nothing had happened, and life continued.

Once I invited her to the opera and Robert got us two tickets in a box. She wore my silver foxes and we go in the car, with Pavel driving, and when we get to the tee-ater she sat right there until Pavel open the door. Then she put her hand like this on his arm and get out—I had given her lessons in etiquette. I used to teach her all kinds of things and we giggled and giggled. Then seated in the tee-ater, she put the box of nice chocolates that Robert had given us on the rail covered with the red velvet, and hugely enjoyed the life. Of course, in America it wouldn't be noticeable, but in Russia it was a dream.

"Does everybody notice I have these chocolates?" she ask, the performance going on.

Then peering all around she say, "Do you think the people will think I'm a general's wife?"

Oh! everything was just perfect.

Once Faye Emerson and Elliott Roosevelt, when they were married, came to Moscow and they came to the tee-ater. My mother and I were there and suddenly I saw Mother purse her lips.

"Mama, what's wrong?" I ask.

"How she dressed," my mother say.

I looked more closely and saw she was wearing a suit with a scarf on her head and thick, woolen stockings.

"Why she tried to dress so poor?" Mother muttered. "Does she think she will not be distinguished from the Russians if she dresses poor and will not hurt us? Bah! Bah!"

Another time I asked Mother to the tee-ater and at the last

minute I couldn't go, so sent her by herself, and she came back as mad as can be.

"How much you pay for the ticket?" she ask.

"Thirty rubles," I say.

"Thirty rubles! And I didn't cry once."

So I sent her then to a very sentimental play. It starts with the dying of love, the most sentimental the Soviet can produce; and my mother came back smiling broadly, her eyes puffed with crying.

"That's the play," she say. "I start to cry in the first act and I cry all the way through."

21

Forty-eight Hours to Leave Moscow

WHEN I FIRST got back to Moscow, everybody was so happy that the war was over and so full of hope that life now would be better. Russians came to Americans' homes and Americans went to Russian homes and everybody was friendly and gay. Now that I spoke English, I soon knew all the diplomatic corps and Robert and I went out to many functionary things. And we, too, entertained. Besides the chauffeur, we had a cook, and so, for a short time, life went on quite comfortably.

In 1947 Molotov gave a big reception to celebrate the anniversary of the Revolution and I went beautifully dressed in the white lace, the long, white gloves, and with shoes that match my chiffon handkerchief—a kind of purplish color. Very striking.

But no sooner had I arrived than here comes up to me that same Russian consul, Postoyev, who was so disagreeable to me that time I spoke at that luncheon in Los Angeles. Remember?

"Your place is in Siberia," he said to me angrily, "and not at a Molotov reception."

I just turned my back on him. I walked away and looked at

all the Russian generals and marshals with medals up to their shoulders and down to their stomachs.

"There is no need to worry about the next war," I said to a group of friends.

"Why, Nila?" they asked.

"There is no more place for the medals."

This joke spread like a fire over Moscow, for you see the Russian generals wear so many medals they even cover their navel things.

Then we came to the ballroom, and at that time the queen of the diplomatic corps was wife of the Swedish ambassador with the red hair. She was in black velvet with the huge skirt, stiff with crinoline, and with long, black gloves. When the music play, it is a waltz, and she begins immediately to dance with some diplomat whose name I don't know.

Then the Swedish ambassador, who didn't change his uniform since the sixteenth century—it is gold brocade with blue ribbon across the chest and stars there—came to me, bow, and ask me to dance. There is still only one couple on the floor—his wife and partner. I suppose he choose me because I'm in the white dress.

He gave me his arm like they gave ladies to dance the minuet, and I rest my hand right above his wrist, and then with complete easiness I took the tail of my dress in my other hand and we came to the floor.

Then he bow again and put his arm around me and we start to waltz. We waltz on one side quite nicely and then on the other. The whole waltz nobody else get up. What a triumph! In my bright satin shoes and my bright chiffon handkerchief! Just to watch the face of the Russian woman! It was complete revenge for the humiliation I suffered at my first diplomatic reception.

This was right after I married Robert. Maxim Litvinov gave it and so everybody knew it will be very, very formal. Litvinov

always wore white tie and tails himself. I had nothing to wear and knew nothing of diplomatic etiquette, but I had a Russian friend, who was the wife of a producer in the movies. She knew more of the life and so she coached me. She also gave me an evening bag and an evening dress; it was a black thing and it hit me above my calves and this, you must remember, was before the day of short evening dresses. It was cut on the bias, too, and when I pushed my body inside it got wider and shorter. So what to do? We decided to rip it at the shoulders and put some straps in and when we did that it went down O.K., but the waist was almost on my hips. To hide the straps my friend gave me a red jacket and it, too, was much too small. It was just under the bust and the sleeves were halfway between my wrist and elbow.

I really looked the most pitiful, except I had on one nice thing. Betty Barnes, the wife of Joe Barnes, sent me the most beautiful stockings. They had lace heels and lace toes. They were the most exquisite present. She also offered to lend me her evening shoes, but how can I squeeze in them?

Another friend, a Russian, had a pigtail that belonged to her grandmother. Since I had very short hair, she made this grandmother's pigtail around my head in the way of decoration. Poor Robert! I will never forget his eyes when he saw me—they were frightened to death. All evening, though he later denied it emphatically, he was pretending not to know me. Oh, I was so pitiful! This black dress, this red jacket, and this pigtail around my hair. What worried me worse is that I will faint or have a heart attack and they will take off the jacket and see these straps.

And here we went!

Litvinov was a real European host. He received at the top of these long steps, with a huge mirror behind him. If somebody important comes, he makes one step down and he will say, "How do you do?" and the guest will proceed.

I was like Natasha in *War and Peace* when she came for her first ball, except I was double her age and had not a beautiful dress and no chance to put up my hands. You remember, when Natasha arrived at the ball, she put up her hands so they wouldn't be red?

The protocol officer called, "Mr. and Mrs. Magidoff."

And Litvinov said, "I hope you will have a good time."

And I said, "Don't worry. I already do."

Then we came to the ballroom and we sit in a corner. I sat with my feet flat on the floor for all my friends had coached me not to sit with my legs crossed. Robert danced with me once, but much as I love him, I must say he's a poor dancer. There's no sailing in his dancing. Then Gordon Kashin ask me to dance and we got up, but he can't move. It seems so funny; it is such a beautiful floor, so beautifully polished; then I look down and see he has on his rubbers. They were so shiny, he thought they were his evening shoes.

When he goes to take them off, like an accident, in front of me suddenly was a very tall, handsome, military attaché. He has these little things that click and he has the panties with the red things down the sides and the greenish jacket with the shiny belt and gold epaulets.

At first I couldn't believe he was asking me to dance. I looked all around and when I saw he meant me, I said, "Thank you, but I don't dance."

Of course I was dying to dance, but I was afraid to dance with a stranger in this dress. I didn't know what might happen to it. So I went on sitting there in that corner, timidly, just watching, never imagining myself coming back from America with everything just right and dancing with the Swedish ambassador. As I told you, it was a real triumph.

These gay times didn't last long, though. The political situation began to be very bad—even more horrible than before the war. They started to arrest people with Western ideas: writers,

artists, musicians. They began to arrest those who in their minds might be potential enemies. Then they start to arrest small people who are working for foreigners.

Many Russians had made American friends during the war and nobody persecuted them for that; but now the Russians were afraid to visit their American friends, for the Soviet began to carry on such an anti-American campaign. You see, America was such a big hope for the Russian people. The simple, Russian people looked up to the Americans and admired them tremendously, so the Kremlin feel it must destroy this warm feeling for America in the Russians' minds. They want to bring up a new generation that hates America.

Now when Russian propaganda starts going, it is really going. It was the biggest organized campaign against America you can imagine. Even in puppet shows, in circuses, in everything, they propagandized this hate.

This campaign became so serious that I had a meeting with my mother and sister and I told them that no matter how much I want to be with them and help them, I feel it's very dangerous for them to continue seeing me. So we decide they must go hundreds and hundreds of miles away. I said to my sister, "You will be free there." I bought them tickets and sent them with lots of baggage.

Both Robert and I grew most unhappy and completely disillusioned about the hope-for reforms in the Soviet government and want to come home to the freedom of the United States; but before it can be arranged, Robert noticed, when he looked out of the window one morning, a plain-clothes NKVD man on the sidewalk, watching our apartment house. It was easy as can be to recognize one, for they all dress the same in caps and brown coats and were the most healthy-looking people, for they ate well and do nothing, and were the first to be tanned in the spring.

"Nila," Robert said, "Someone in our house is being shadowed."

We didn't think too much about it, though, as a good many important Soviet officials and three other foreigners lived there, until I saw the man start off a few paces behind Robert when he left for the office.

Then I took a big envelope and put in it all my jewelry and a letter which I wrote and gave it to Melvin Ruggles, the cultural attaché of the American embassy, who lived in the apartment above us. In this letter I said if anything happens to me and I be arrested, and if something against America or my husband will appear in the papers, please believe I didn't sign it voluntarily.

At the same time I wrote a letter to my mother and sister that I am through with them; that they are no longer to consider me their daughter and sister. I also say if any official will ask them have they any contact with Robert and me, they are to say they have nothing to do with these Americans, these warmongers. I have chosen this life without them. And it was true. We had been completely cut off from one another. And I send this letter through the open mail.

When Robert came home for lunch we decided to make certain whether or not the man was following Robert, so he and I went for a walk and, sure enough, he did follow us. At the corner, though, we separated and that threw him into a real dilemma. First he started to come after me, but then he changed his mind and followed Robert. By that evening there were two men watching our apartment, and by morning there were two men and two girls.

Then on April 15, very early in the morning, the telephone was ringing and it was Eddy Gilmore, chief of the Moscow bureau of the Associated Press.

"What kind of statement you will make?" he ask Robert.

"Eddy, what are you talking about? What kind of statement?"

"Haven't you seen the morning paper?" Eddy asked.

"No," Robert say, "not yet."

"Well, there is a letter in *Izvestia*, signed by your secretary, saying you are a spy for the United States."

Quickly we got a copy of the paper and then Robert telephoned General Bedell Smith and asked him to send a car for us to bring us to the embassy. In a few minutes it came, flying the United States flag on the fender.

As soon as we arrived at the embassy, Bedell Smith invited us to come immediately and stay with him and his wife Nora at Spasso House, the residence, you know, of the ambassador, until he could talk to Molotov and get permission for us to leave Moscow.

"Thank you, General," said Robert, "but if we do that the Russians will say that the American ambassador is giving sanctuary to an American spy. Also, it would look like I am seeking refuge because I am guilty of something."

Then Robert went to his office at the Hotel Metropole to prepare his answer to his secretary's letter and I went back to the apartment. The letter was as fantastic as can be. The poor girl and her husband and mother and father were all Soviet citizens, and she simply had to sign what the Soviet Foreign Office prepared for her. She was a nice girl; Robert and I liked her very much, and we weren't in the least bit angry with her; we just felt terribly sorry for her.

Briefly, the letter accused Robert of receiving assignments on the official stationery of the McGraw-Hill publishing house in New York to collect secret information about the Soviet Union and of sending the answers to these assignments, not in the usual way, but by diplomatic pouch.

Of course, it was just a frame-up to expel Robert from the country because he knew and understood so much about the

workings of the Kremlin; but it wasn't even a smart frame-up, for Robert was an accredited correspondent of the McGraw-Hill publishing house and naturally received from them the same questionnaires they sent all their foreign correspondents.

Robert didn't try to answer the letter point by point; it was too ridiculous. However, he did say most emphatically that in all the twelve years that he had worked in the Soviet Union he had never received a cable, letter or any other kind of communication from McGraw-Hill, NBC, or anybody else, except through the regular channels. Of course, his mail was addressed to him in care of the United States embassy as is the mail of many Americans in Russia and other foreign countries, but all of it came through the regular mail, never by pouch. Also, he never sent any stories out except through the usual censorship channels.

When he finished his statement, he sent one to *Izvestia* and then, at a press conference, gave copies to all the foreign correspondents. Then he telephoned the Press Department of the Soviet Foreign Office, asking to see the acting chief, Mr. Vasilenko. All right, Mr. Vasilenko said, at four o'clock that afternoon.

As Robert came into his office, Mr. Vasilenko got up from behind his desk, walked halfway across the room, held out his hand and said, "How do you do, Mr. Magidoff?"

"I can't understand," Robert said, "how you shake hands with an American spy."

Mr. Vasilenko seemed very embarrassed and not once during the interview did he look Robert in the eye. Still he said that the Press Department could no longer allow Robert to have a press card and that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot permit him to remain in the Soviet Union for more than forty-eight hours, or in case of some emergency, seventy-two hours.

The next day the Press Department of the Foreign Office

called Robert and said, "Your passport is ready; the exit visa has been stamped on it."

"What do you mean, 'my passport'?" asked Robert. "I'd like to pick up my wife's and my passport at the same time."

"Your wife's is not ready," the man said.

Robert answered, "I will not call for one until both are ready."

Robert and I rushed again to Bedell Smith and he promised he would talk with the Foreign Office immediately. "Nila," he said, "if it comes to the worse, I'll pack you in a trunk and take you out myself."

Oh, the next hours were something! I was like I was in a trance. One whole day was already passed and no exit visa. Then the second day came and the Press Department telephoned Robert and said, "You may call for both passports; they are now ready."

So here I go again!

We were told we could take out only 220 pounds, but I really didn't care. For once I had no material interests. Besides our few suitcases, we had some laundry bags and we decided to fill these, but not to take any pictures or letters of our Russian friends.

Bedell Smith telephoned and invited us again to stay at Spasso House for the last twenty-four hours, but again Robert refused. Robert did say, though, we would be happy to come to a farewell dinner Saturday evening, which was the last evening before our plane was scheduled to leave.

That afternoon I had to do the manicure and I went in a small street to a shop where I knew nobody and nobody knew me. In America I usually do my own manicure, but in Moscow those last years I lived very high. Now, in all the beauty shops in Moscow, the manicure things stand in a row and the manicurists and customers talk back and forth to one another.

Suddenly the girl who was making me the manicure said,

"Have you read in the papers about the American spy? And just think his only punishment for this crime is to get out of Russia and go back to America!" She sighed with the real envy and the whole time she made the manicure she told what she will buy if she can only get to America.

Then we went for the dinner. There were just the four of us, Nora, the general, Robert and I, and when I started to say good-by to the general, he say, "I'll see you in the morning. I'm going to the airport to see you off."

"But the plane goes at eight o'clock," I protested.

"That's all right," he said. "I'll be there."

And don't forget this, Willie, this was Sunday morning.

Walter Cronkite of the United Press came for us in his car. When we reached the airport there was Bedell Smith in gray coat, gray felt hat, gray suede gloves. If Churchill will come to Moscow, Bedell Smith wouldn't be more dressed.

So we went on the plane and high in the air we can see the ambassador is still there.

Our first stop was supposed to be Berlin. Robert had particularly requested tickets for the nonstop Moscow-Berlin plane from the Soviet foreign travel agency; but when it was too late to do anything about it, he discovered he had been given tickets on the Moscow-Minsk-Berlin plane. Robert was white as paper. He understand that this stop at Minsk means we will still be in Soviet territory and there will be no American embassy officials or newspapermen to protest or report anything the NKVD might do to us. Also, our luggage will be inspected there, for it is the law that customs officers inspect the bags at the last point the plane stops on Russian territory.

As soon as we landed at Minsk, an NKVD man came to the plane and said, "All passengers out of plane," and then for four hours and twenty-five minutes, the customs officials examined not only our luggage but us personally. They took out my shoulder pads and see inside; they tear the lining from

my handbag; they finger with the quick, expert movements the hem of my dress.

In Robert's briefcase, they found a picture of a young daughter of one of our Russian friends, which we had overlooked. My heart stopped beating. Oh, what might the NKVD do to a Russian family who were friends of an American spy!

"Who she is?" the inspector ask.

Without a moment's hesitation I say, "That was me when I was young."

With the suspicious eyes, he look at the blond hair of the young girl and then at my dark hair, and then he open his mouth to say something, but immediately I say, "I used to bleach my hair, but surely you can tell those eyes are mine."

Slowly he nod his head and hand back the picture. However, he is most unhappy about me. "You have changed a great deal, you have," he say sadly.

They took everything else, though, from the briefcase, except a few pictures of Robert and me. Robert's copies of *Izvestia* with the secretary's letter, his answer to it, his notes, letters, my English and French textbooks, writing pads, address books—everything.

Then after making all this mess in our other suitcases, they said, "Pack it."

But I was so mad I said, "Pack it yourself!"

Of course, though, we pack it; then they came and said, "You may go now." When I got on the plane, I began to cry.

So at last we landed at Templehof airport and were met by Ed Haaker of NBC, an old friend of Robert's. He drove and drove us and drove us until finally we came to the American sector of Berlin where we smelled the freedom once again.

22

The Pressure of Life in Louisville

I DIDN'T COME with Robert to New York from Berlin, for I went crazy with worry about my mother and sister and with disillusionment at the Kremlin's continued oppression of the people. You know, I honestly thought after the war life for the Russian people will be better and more free, but now I know there is no hope and I am very, very sick, both mentally and physically. So I went for a long rest at the Montebello sanatorium in Elsinor, Denmark.

Then I arrived in New York and President Taylor of Sarah Lawrence College ask me can I give Russian lessons there. So I make an appointment with him for 2:30 the next afternoon.

And now Charlie Farnsley, who has become the Mayor of Louisville, comes into the picture. The very same day I had an appointment with President Taylor, the telephone is ringing and it is Charlie Farnsley. He has something wrong with him and he is in a New York hospital and wants to see me. So, on the way to see President Taylor, I stop at the hospital and Charlie asks me what I'm going to do. I tell him I may be teaching at this Sarah Lawrence.

"Why not teach at the University of Louisville?" Charlie asks.

And I say I would like to very much. I read once that somebody described heaven as "a Kentucky of a place" and I agree with him 100 per cent. Not only have I many friends in Louisville, but I have always thought there were more happily married couples there than any place I have ever been. People who have been married a long time and have grown children and are still very much in love.

As for Robert, he is already signed up for three years of lecturing, and so it wouldn't make any difference where he lived just so he could have a real home.

So Charlie phoned the president of the University of Louisville, who was also a Mr. Taylor, and it was agreed I would come. I didn't even go to the Sarah Lawrence. I just called and broke the appointment.

I was pleased as can be, except for one small thing. I was upset about Charlie's personal life. I had on that day a sapphire ring and Charlie looked at it and said, "I gave a ring just like that to Miss Nancy."

And I thought, My God, when I was in Louisville, he and his wife were a happily married couple and had children, and now some secretary, a Miss Nancy, has come along and broken up his nice home. It wasn't until that evening, when I told Robert this drama, that I learned it was an old Southern custom to call your wife like this.

So that fall, Robert and I came to Louisville to live. Though there was scarcely anything for rent at this time, Nancy Farnsley had found a furnished house for us and we arranged with the real-estate man to meet us where the Cincinnati Highway strikes the city limits and to lead us to the place.

And here we are. He led us through beautiful Cherokee Park; then we came out of the park onto the beautiful Douglass Boulevard and I'm happy as can be. Such fine looking, substantial

houses everywhere, and big grounds with grass and lots of trees. But we passed by the beautiful part and crossed the Bardstown Road and came to the more democratic section. Then we stopped in front of one of the most ugly houses I ever saw in America. What was so awful, it was pretending to be a pretentious house when it wasn't. It had a little porch with two stone vases with the dried-up leaves. The living room, which you walked directly into from this little porch, was dark like a hell, and there was deer heads on the wall.

"Those heads!" I cried to Robert, the tears running like a flood.

"Oh, my dear," said Robert, who is a placable man, "they can be taken down."

So out went the deer heads to the basement. And out went the curtains and covers on the furniture, which wasn't my choosing either. Then I got the material to make new curtains and new covers, though I had never sewed anything except I had made in Moscow my clothes by hand. But I never say, "I can't do it," because I know if I try hard enough, I can do anything.

I bought a sewing Singer and took my eight lessons free and they showed me patiently how to pull the thread through the needle, but I never could seem to do it and, so, each time I had to put in a new spool I had to ask my neighbor next door to show me. She really showed me again and again, for I don't belong to the machinery age.

Also, I had a hard time interpreting the directions. I bought a Vogue pattern once and it said to cut the material on the bias, but as I didn't know what this meant, I came to Robert, who was reading, and asked, "What does bias mean?"

And Robert, not even looking up, answered, "It means prejudice."

"But how," I asked, "can I cut the material on prejudice?"

I succeeded, though, in making the curtains and covers and

then I framed some paintings we had brought from Russia. Then I said to Robert, "I'm going to give a dinner and I want to do something new."

The neighbor who was teaching me to thread the machine worked in a wholesale liquor store and she offered to buy the liquor for me.

"Two bottles of Bou-bon," I tell her, and she looks shocked as can be. Of course, I understand later that nobody in Louisville buys just two bottles of Bou-bon; everybody buys this Kentucky milk by the case.

But what to cook? That was my problem. The top of my cooking invention was to hardboil eggs and then fry them.

Finally I decided to have *pelmeni* like I had in Siberia, but in Siberia, we made *pelmeni* with bear meat. Of course, there was no bear meat in Louisville, so I tried every substitute and every combination of substitutes: pork, liver, beef, chicken, ham—everything. You don't know what poor Robert suffered. He got so fat on these experiment *pelmenis*, you, Willie, worried about him. Remember? You said, "Nila, what are you going to do about Robert gaining so much weight?"

And I said, "It's just more beloved flesh."

Then I experiment with the pastry to surround the meat. Sometimes it was too sticky to roll; sometimes it was too flaky and fell to pieces. At last, though, I struck it on the head and then I invite the guests: the Warwick Andersons, the Morton Boyds, the Barry Binghams and Estridges.

I don't remember what I served first. Maybe a little herring or something. Then I brought this steaming bowl of *pelmeni* and a frozen bottle of vodka. And here we are, everybody seated nicely and in evening clothes.

I say, "This is the dish I ate when I was in exile in Siberia."

Barry took one *pelmeni* and he poured on it this special sauce I had made of vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper, and he

put it in his mouth, and then he stood up and said, "Show me the road to Siberia."

Oh, it was so gay. And I was really surprised how well vodka parallels with Bou-bon. "Buttons up," I kept saying, for I enjoy hugely this American expression for drinking everything in the glass. I was so very, very happy that I could at last have friends in my own home, even if it was a rented house.

After this I learned to make many dishes and how to cook with a cookbook; but, of course, I never aspired so high as to be a Huncan Dines. I used Marion Flexner's cookbook, *Out of Kentucky Kitchens*, because I considered myself proudly a Kentuckian. It stumped me, though, sometimes. I remember once I was trying to make some rolls and I read in the book, "scold the milk." Well, I didn't know what "scold" meant so I looked it up in the dictionary and it said "to use cross words." That really confused me, so I called up Doro-ty Clark and she said I had misread the word; it was "scald."

My proudest moment as a cook happened one night when I had Marion herself and Dr. Morris Flexner to dinner. Of course, I did my best: Southern-fried chicken, crisp fried potatoes, a vegetable and salad, and then for dessert I had a pecan torte with raspberry jam. The doctor enjoyed it hugely, and after a second helping he said to Marion, "Be sure to find out from Nila the recipe for this cake."

"I don't need to," said Marion. "It is in my cookbook and you've eaten it at home several times."

As you can understand, I quickly changed the subject.

And now to the Russian teaching, which, after all, was the reason we were in Louisville. Some weeks before classes were to start, I went to see Dr. John Broderius, who was the head of the foreign language department for the university. I told him honestly I never taught anything, that I don't know how, but I'm anxious to try.

"My idea in teaching," I told him, "is not by the book, step by step, but first to make the students interested in the language and to give them a desire to know it. I feel that a teacher must first vibrate a love for what she's teaching and never look at the clock. She must love being with the students and get a real pleasure from their efforts to learn."

He was very much pleased with my sincerity and he smelled at once that I'd make the students love the language. He understood that I didn't know scientifically the teaching methods, but he saw I spoke Russian beautifully and that I'm enthusiastic about it, especially about the Russian poetry.

So when school opened I came at such and such a time and met my class. There were twelve students, a nice, strong group. Some of them had had Russian before, so I passed a book around for them to read, in order to have some idea how much they already knew, and I got so involved in this examination I passed the book to Dr. Broderius, who had come in to observe how I was doing. He quietly read the paragraph I indicated and when he had finished I, still unconscious who he was, said, "Your pronunciation is not bad."

Maybe, Willie, you put it right here. I was the greatest nuisance to him. I run to him with every problem and he was always so helpful, even more than helpful. Many people can be helpful, but he was enthusiastically helpful.

At first I wouldn't let anybody speak a word of English. If somebody must say something and doesn't know the Russian word, he can make the object on the blackboard. Once somebody wanted to say "milk" and he didn't know the Russian, so he make a cow with these things hanging and everybody shout, "milk."

Just as soon as most of the students knew 100 Russian words, I had them reading Russian poetry and singing Russian songs. I developed exercises all my own. We'll take the poetry and what will we do? We say the words in hard staccato just as fast

as we can say them—*dididididi.* We read it first in sixteenth time so you can't distinguish one word from another. Then in eighth time, then in fourth, then in half, then very slowly. When they say it slowly, they say it very beautifully.

But we shout the poetry and sing the songs so loud, nobody else in the building can teach, so they move my class away off by itself—somewhere, I believe, by the kitchen.

My students even translated a Shakespearean sonnet into Russian. Of course, it was just a short sonnet and a very humble effort, but it was a creative thing.

Nevertheless, I thought we didn't have enough time together to learn all that should be learned—we met just two times a week—so I invited them to my house to tea, and we have music and poetry. It was not a cold teacher-student relationship, but a very wonderful, warm relation. I enjoy it just as much as they did—more, maybe. And I was so proud of them. I used to say to Robert, who was busy writing and speaking, and didn't come to the teas, "They speak so well," and Robert say, "You exaggerate."

Then one day I said the next lesson will be biography. Each student must take some public figure and be prepared to talk about him in Russian. Then they come to tea and Robert, at my insistence, comes and hears them talking freely about Napoleon and Lenin and Churchill and Pushkin, and his face drop and drop. How happy it made me to see his face drop like that.

Dean Oppenheimer, however, was not so happy with the situation. He called me to his office and said the students are working too much in Russian. He says they get A all around in Russian, but the other teachers are complaining they neglect their other studies. He says I'm giving them too much to do. I say, no, that is not the case at all; they are just so interested, they study whether I give them assignments or not.

My students even moved Robert and me in Russian, but that comes later. First I must tell you about finding the new house.

Robert and I used to walk in the evenings on the Douglas Boulevard to Cherokee Park and we always liked very much a certain house very near the park that was most dignified and substantial. We always said if we can ever have a lot of money to buy a house of our own, that's the kind we'd like to have. You know, just building the castles in the air.

Then one beautiful moonshine evening, in front of this house we saw a sign "For Sale" and I turn to Robert and say, "It is the fate," but Robert just laughs and says we couldn't dream affording such a house.

But I argue, "Let's just see, anyway, how it looks on the inside; we don't have to buy it. Let's just see if it's as beautiful inside as it is outside."

So we got in touch with the real-estate man—his name was Major Gott, and he was a radio fan of Robert's. He had listened to him every morning when he had broadcast from Moscow. He showed us the inside and it really was just as lovely as the outside. Then he broke the sad news. The owner, a Mr. Charles Harrington, who then lived in London, was asking $48,000 for it.

Robert said if we put together everything we have, we have not enough. It was just crazy, he said, for us to think about it on our means. So, with a sickness in our hearts, we went away.

Several months went by and then Mr. Gott came to see us and said he had just received a cablegram from Mr. Harrington to push the sale of the house. He was tired of paying taxes and the upkeep on it. Sell it, he wired, for $42,500.

Robert say still, "We can't afford it."

"Make an offer," Mr. Gott say.

"I can't even make an offer," Robert say.

"Offer $5,000," I say.

"Don't be ridiculous," Robert say. "The garden alone is worth $5,000."

"Well," Mr. Gott say, "if I turned the 42 around and said

you could have it for $24,500, would you be interested then?"

Robert look at my face and saw the longing written there. I wanted it so much. All my grown-up life I had dreamed of a house of my own.

"All right," said Robert. "If we can get it for that, we will take it."

So Mr. Gott cabled Mr. Harrington that he had a party interested at $24,500, and Mr. Harrington cabled back, "SELL IT."

It was then my students moved Robert and me entirely in the Russian language. We just moved by the car, for, as you know, we had no furniture. We used a student's car and our car. It was a real Russian moving, with no English spoke all day.

To have no furniture is a great convenience when moving, but no good when living in a vacant house. It was only after we bought the house did I understand how much it cost to buy furniture for such a big place. Robert said we will just buy cushions and sit and sleep on them, but I discovered the Auction Mart, which sells only second-hand furniture, and from it I furnish the whole house. All my life I had to invent things; it's the one thing for which I'm thankful to Stalin; so now I knew how to buy whatever is for sale and make it do.

And the Auction Mart took such a thought of it! Mr. Hugh Standiford there would call and say, "I think, Mrs. Magidoff, we have something you can use." They felt such a responsibility for me, a new citizen of the town.

I was always worried, though, that some of my Louisville friends will come and recognize their old, cast-away furniture. And one day it happened. I invited one of my neighbors, Mrs. Leland Taylor, to lunch, and the minute she came to the dining room, I knew the furniture had belonged to her. However, it was all right. She was really pleased I was enjoying it.

I even bought ten second-hand card tables for fifty cents each so there was no going up and down, borrowing tables, like all my friends whenever they give big parties.

The peak of all the Louisville experiences, though, was the presidential election of 1948. What completely fascinated me was that everybody, such as Barry and Mark who were supporting Mr. Truman with all their hearts, and even the leaders of the Democratic party such as Charlie Farnsley and Wilson Wyatt, say Dewey will win. And of course, Mr. and Mrs Dewey say he will win. Mrs. Dewey choose the dress for the inauguration and the Dewey children invite their friends to visit them at the White House. Everybody is unanimous 100 per cent that Mr. Truman will be defeated and Mr. Dewey will be elected.

Then the people went to vote and they just quietly elect who they want.

The night of the election Robert and I were at the party at the *Courier Journal* that Mary and Barry always have for a few close friends, all Democrats, of course, and we watch at first the huge progress of Dewey.

Then we continue to watch and slowly the numbers become more even, and by midnight it was already decided that Truman is the winner. Oh, what a wonderful, thrilling, beautiful feeling there was! Not because I liked Mr. Truman so much and disliked Mr. Dewey—I really didn't know too much about American politics—but that the people elected somebody whom all the leaders said could not be elected.

I was so excited I couldn't sleep all night. Robert and I never drink except at a party, but that night when we got home I said to Robert, "Let us drink to the people who can elect who they want."

The next morning I was in the grocery store on the Bardstown Road and I was running around like a mad, crying, "Can imagine the voters electing Mr. Truman against the predictions of everybody? Even the predictions of the newspapers! How I would love to stuff yesterday's newspapers, with the headlines announcing Dewey is the next president, and today's newspa-

pers, with the headlines announcing Truman is the next president, down the chimneys of the Kremlin!"

Everybody look at me with the puzzled eyes. I remember Doro-ty Clark and Isabel McMeekin were there and they already forgot in the pressure of life that there was an election. They were just taking it for granted. But to me it was a miracle, and I felt I was lucky as can be to be in this country and see it for myself.

When I said a little while ago I didn't know too much about American politics, I should have added, "and other American matters," for I was always learning new things. I went once with Robert to Cincinnati where he was speaking, and I was telling some people there how much I liked Louisville and the South. Then one of them said, "How do you feel about the race question?"

And with easiness I answered, "It's no problem. We just have the races twice a year—in the spring and fall."

Now comes the down balance. I adjust myself well in Louisville, but Robert grew very tired of lecturing and leaving me alone so much of the time and felt he'd like to write more and make special broadcasts on Russian developments, and for these two things it would be better to live in New York. Also he was most anxious to study at Columbia University's Russian Institute.

So, here I am, moving once again. Will I never have roots in the ground, I wonder. Will I never stay in one place long enough to plant a tree and watch it grow? And what to do with the beautiful house? If we rent it, we will always run into troubles, so we decide to put it on sale. Many people come to see it and like it, but it is too big for everybody.

Then one afternoon I saw Ann Wyatt and Mavin Brown coming up the front walk and I thought I must have asked them for cocktails. But, no, they came as the wives of Wilson

and Eli, who are trustees of the University of Louisville, looking for a new house for the president. Almost immediately it is decided they will take it and the men get together and sign the papers.

Oh, it was a sad day!

23

I Find My Place

When we left Louisville, we bought an apartment in a cooperative apartment house in New York. Then, as it was summer and Robert wanted peace and quiet to write, we went on to Squam Lake in New Hampshire. This wasn't the first time we had been there. We had gone the summer after our expulsion from Russia for Robert to write. We had returned every summer since, always staying at Rockywold, one of the camps run by Mrs. Samuel Armstrong, the wife of General Armstrong of the Civil War.

Yes, the Civil War. I am absolutely positive because of an embarrassing incident that happened to me once. As we were going to arrive one summer at Rockywold on Mrs. Armstrong's eighty-seventh birthday, I made her a cake from Marion Flexner's cookbook called Robert E. Lee's Beloved Cake. I brought it to the party and with such a swish I said, "Now that we live in Louisville, Kentucky, I bring you the cake of Robert E. Lee."

My God! Such a silence in the room! Mrs. Armstrong's daughter, Mrs. Ar-tur Howe, was there and many other people, but for a full minute there was not one sound.

"Did I say something wrong?" I asked.

Then somebody told me General Armstrong was not on the South, but on the opposite, and from the atmosphere I feel I touch American history with my fingers.

However, Mrs. Armstrong is such a grand, beautiful lady she tried to put me at ease. She pat me on the shoulder and say, "Don't be embarrassed, Mrs. Magidoff. General Armstrong was respected in the South as well as the North."

This summer after we left Louisville we didn't stay, though, at Rockywold, but rented a cottage, Paugus, owned by Mrs. Lawrence Webster, who became one of our very close friends.

And now comes the story of our own house and our own land! Mrs. Ar-tur Howe belongs to a Professional Woman's Club of Plymouth, New Hampshire, and she approach Robert and ask will he and I speak there, and we agree, never expecting this day will be one of the most important of our lives. It was just a free engagement, you understand, and we go there, thinking nothing to mention will happen.

The chairman of this one was a very small, very . . . how you say in English, so accurate? . . . no, not neat . . . everything was so . . . so compact, and the face is so open with big dark eyes looking. Her name is Mrs. Mary Small Conrad. I like her at once.

We are seated, Robert on her right and I on her left. Through the years, Robert has developed two kinds of conversation for the lunch and for the dinner before he speaks. If he is traveling by car, he asks how to go to the next town; but if he doesn't drive, then he asks what is the chairman's occupation, and while the chairman occupies the whole lunch or dinner answering these questions, Robert quietly eats his meal.

This day he asks Mrs. Small, "What is your occupation?"

She say, "I'm a real-estate agent."

And Robert say idly, "Oh, fine. Maybe you find us a cottage on Squam."

She say, "It's very hard, but if I have something I will get in contact with you."

We make the speech and then three weeks later comes a letter from Mrs. Small. She has a piece of land she thinks we will like.

Robert telephones her and say, "We can't think of buying land and having to build a house." But she say, "Anyway, just go there and see it."

So we came there and the land is a complete wilderness. They are seven acres, with a small island in front, and it is absolutely covered with birches, spruce, hemlock and everygreens. It is unbelievably beautiful and I say to Robert, "This is the balance. We lost our house in Louisville and God wants us to have this land so, at last, we can really belong somewhere."

Robert is doubtful, but I say, "This land is not expensive and even if we don't build on it, we will have it for our roots."

So it was decided, and in four or five days, Mary Small cleared the deeds and we signed them. On the same day, Robert and I paddled across the lake—the land was on the opposite side from Paugus. As we paddled I'm sure not even Columbus on discovering America felt so happy as I. The sky was bright blue and there was this quietness, this stillness, and such a peace. Nobody is there around. No boat, no dock, no civilized thing. Absolute quietness. It was like Robert wrote in one of his poems on Squam:

> Here nature has retained its peace with God and man
> And shares it with you.

We tie the canoe to a tree and get out. Then we put our arms around each other. I don't know whether Robert cry or not, but I know I cry. Then we walk around. The trees are as thick as in a deep forest and the brush is as high as I am. The Indians left it and the Magidoffs moved in.

I said to Robert, "Let's build a house."

"No," said Robert. "We must wait and see how we stand."

"No," I argued. "Let's build a house now."

It seems unbelievable, but we decide to build. We went to Mary Small and told her and she said, "I thought you would and I have a contractor who I believe will be just the one to do it. A man named Armand Roux."

Now, I always thought of a contractor as a heavy man with a belt under his belly, maybe a pipe, but definitely with a belt. The name, Armand Roux, doesn't go with the belly, but still I expected one until we go to his place and there comes this man, slender as a pencil and with eyes as big as coffee cups and such a-lashes. The friendship began with the first sight.

I told him what everybody tells when he builds the house. "We want to build a nice, big house, but we have very little money."

He came next day for tea and by this time I more or less plan what I want. As I said to Robert, "Every house must have an idea, and in our house I want to have many guests, but I want to build so we will be comfortable from the guests and the guests will be comfortable from us."

I drew it in two parts and separated the guest room from us by a closed terrace. So you see, the guests will really be isolated there.

I show to Armand my little drawing, which I have made with the sewing rule, and I ask, "Can you build with this one?" And he say, "Yah. It's nice; not so many doors." He look and look and say he can build it for $8,000.

After we agree, every day, between six and seven o'clock in the morning, Robert and I paddle across the lake and begin to clear away the brush and trees for the site. We felt we never do it. We were laboring so hard like the first pioneers. We work from when the sun comes until the sun goes. It was in September and it was the most beautiful month ever on Squam. Rob-

ert chop and I pile. We were very happy, even more happy than when we bought the house in Louisville because now we were creating something of our very own with our own hands. Robert and I always live on good terms, but this hard work makes us better; we try to outdo each other being nice.

Of course, the biggest trees we couldn't cut, so we got this man with the engine-saw to do these. I tell you it was a real wilderness. In fact it was so wild that one day when Armand studied the land through this machine on the long legs to see that the place for the house will be even, and put up the strings, the deer during the night went right through them.

Then one day as we cleared, we discovered something like a hill. When we dug into it we found hand-hewn slabs of stone evidently piled there by the Indians. We decided with those stones we will build a terrace, eighteen by twelve feet, with steps going to the house. Oh, it was such fun!

But we just got the place cleaned off, the floor down and the roof up, before it was cold weather and we must go back to New York. All winter I have the disease that everybody has who builds the house, of doors and windows just flying through the head.

Then we went through a long period like parents expecting a baby, trying to think how to call it. We think of everything and then Robert says let's call it Marya, which is the peasant form of my mother's name, and we do.

The next spring we went to Squam very early and stayed with Mary Small and I learn so much about living from her: from her way of life, from her genuine simplicity, her deep loving and doing for people, without any vanity on her part, and her trust of people. She never locks her house; she hasn't even one key to it.

"How can you leave it like that?" I asked her.

"I'd rather have something stolen from me," she said, "than not to trust the people."

She taught me how to take everything optimistically. I used to be such a worrier; I used to have as terrible despondent moods as can be, even more black than black, but she explained to me that when you worry, you take your energy that you can use for something else.

She was never bored or lonesome when she was by herself; she had so many interests, Willie, I wish you could see the way she would go with her flowers. And she was always so interested in the problems of her friends, but not just her friends, but of all people, whether she knew them or not; and about the problems of the whole country. She believed that the interests of the country must be your interests; its worries, your worries; its joys, your joys; and its achievements, your achievements. She was the kind of citizen that cements the country. It was a real education for me to be with her.

Just as soon as the sides and roof of our house was up, without even waiting for the electricity or water, we move in and go to work.

Mrs. Howe gave us a book, *Look to the Mountain*, which was the story of the early pioneers making their first settlement in that section. Every time I don't know how to do something, I look through this book and see how that pioneer family built. And I think we did a nice job. On the outside, the house is made of boards of a dull gray color, even the window trim is painted gray. From the lake you don't even notice it, which was our aim, for we want to protect the lake from the house. I even designed most of the furniture and had it built in, but I must confess it's very uncomfortable. Persons who know it, never sit on it; I made it too high.

While we still had no electricity and no water, I invited Mrs. Armstrong and her family to come one afternoon for tea. Now the Armstrongs are like an old-time American family; plenty of people are always pregnant there. Mrs. Armstrong has a lot of children and the children have a lot of children.

Thirty-two came that afternoon. It was like an invasion. Some came by water, some came by land in cars, and some came by land walking. And Mrs. Armstrong headed them all in fur-lined slippers with two canes. She went all over the house and then she say, "Where is the bathroom?"

Robert had put two pails of water in the bathroom for just such an emergency and all afternoon, whenever the children from seventeen years old down to two had asked, "Where is the bathroom?" we had said quickly, "To the bushes!"

So now when Mrs. Armstrong say, "Where is the bathroom?" and before I could say proudly, "This way," little Michael Austin, who was maybe seven years old then, just took in his breath and with real hope in his eyes, say, "Will Grandma have to go to the bushes too?"

Then came the landscaping. You remember how I always longed to own my own land and plant a tree and see it grow? Well, now I do! That fall I planted sixty-seven hemlocks around the terrace and the laundry fence and, believe it or not, only five died. Now every time I return to Squam I have this . . . this . . . I don't even know what word to use . . . pleasure doesn't even begin to express it. Nor even joy. But, anyway, I just run as fast as I can to see my trees. I measure them like people measure their children on the door. When I see they grow inches I'm full of happiness, for it means their roots grow deeper, and the more deeper grow their roots, the more deeper grow mine.

Of course you understand it's not just the planting of the trees and watching them grow that gives me this wonderful feeling of . . . of contentment, but it's the consciousness that I'm now a real part of this country; that I have roots going down and actually belong to a definite place.

My relations with the farming people in New Hampshire also helped to give me this feeling of belonging. They closed in a way the circle of my life. After all, I was born a peasant,

and now I am back on the land with friends who also are close to the nature.

The first person I think of when I think of New Hampshire is a woman named Marge Elliott. You see, Robert and I needed somebody in winter to come after every snow and throw off the snow and look after the trees and house, and so Mary Small suggested this one. I said, "My God, how can woman do like this heavy work?" Already I forgot how hard the woman work in Russia.

Mary Small said, "Just wait, you will see. Marge is married and has a farm and keeps house, but her real pleasure is to work outside."

So the truck drives in and here is Marge. She has a nice, beautifully built body, little feet, bushy, curly hair, and an open, honest face.

That first day she took the shovel to even the terrace and never in my life have I seen anyone shoveling with such easiness, such an abundance. Many times I've watched Russian woman work and they worked for necessity; but Marge worked for pleasure. I left my laundry and began with her to make a rock garden near the terrace. We will go to the woods and find a suitable stone and Marge will heave it into the wheelbarrow and bring it to the house. These stones that first day really cemented our friendship.

Then we planted trees together—just hundreds of them. When she will find a tree that will be good near the house, she will fall on her knees and cry for me to come quickly and see it. I will rush there and she will be kneeling before this tree, her hands clasped in front of her, like in prayer, and her face shining and we, so carefully and lovingly, will dig it up and transplant it.

She is absolutely a child of nature, simple and unspoilt. I see in her the spirit of the first people who come to this country

and also the spirit of my mother. She enjoys everything that life can offer her and at the moment it is offered. So many people, before they can enjoy something must have something else to go with it, but not Marge.

Our relation is much more than that of worker and employer. She does work for us, but she's also happy to be with me and I with her. She calls me "Mother." By the age she can't do it, but it pleases me immensely. And I think she understand even more than Robert what Marya means to me. When I'm in New York and she writes me a letter she writes, "The sky, the lake, the trees are right here waiting for you," and she signs it, "Marge and Marya."

Robert and I have formed other real friendships too. Once when we came to the mailbox at Marya, we found a note from the fruit-growers, Mae and Roger Fairclough, and it said, "Come and pick cherries." And we came there and picked cherries and then sat on the lawn and talked about many things. It was very easy for we had this close connection with the nature.

Then there is a farmer near us by the name of Robert Benoit, with a very sensitive, handsome face, and he grows the best strawberries in New Hampshire. He works from five o'clock in the morning until dark and he takes it for granted.

And busy as he is, he advises me what to plant with the sun and without the sun, and he frequently will bring me little things and show me how to set them out. There are some things, of course, that can be planted only in the very early spring or late fall when Robert and I are still in New York, but Bob Benoit always says, "Don't worry; I'll come and plant them for you, and then in summer I'll come and show you how to take care of them."

Also his wife, whose name is Barbara, will come and give me a jar of strawberry jam, which I understand now how to appre-

ciate, for they plant the strawberries themselves, pick the berries and make the jam. They create something.

Now these farmers have lived on this New Hampshire land by the generations. Their grandfathers and fathers were born there, and now they and their grandchildren live there and they are proud of it. And they like me so much you will be surprised. I have no trouble with them at all. They come to see Robert and me and I make home-made bread and tea for them, and we talk and talk.

I have warm, true friendships with them which make life really worth while. I do believe it is easier for people who are close to nature to make the friendships than for those in cities. Nature gives people such good, working relations, if you can say like that, and their friendships are much more strong. I am very grateful that I can spend almost half of every year working close to nature.

However, I believe in work whether it is with nature or not. You must not come to the comfort without a struggle. If you do, then the comfort will swallow you. You must not just accept the riches of Grandmama and Grandpapa; you must achieve the riches with your own efforts. You can't enjoy fully the things for which you yourself don't fight.

My God! What a statement! But then a book without the philosophy is not a book. Besides, I was never more sincere than when I say nobody will find his place unless he works for it. Some people, who came not long ago to this country, live a troubled life here and they compare the conditions with the old times, in the old country. They don't try to see all sides of American life, to get into the tempo of life. They keep to their old language and associate with their old friends, their former countrymen. Consciously or unconsciously, they try to build an island of their old life right in the middle of this country and, of course, it doesn't work and they suffer. But they don't blame themselves for their unhappiness; they blame America.

What I try to do all the time is to become more and more a part of this country and it makes me happy as can be when somebody say, "You are like one of us." It means that I find my place.

ABOUT THE CO-AUTHOR

WILLIE SNOW ETHRIDGE *is a Southerner by birth, education and marriage. She was born in Savannah, Georgia, attended grammar school, high school and Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, and is married to Mark Ethridge, distinguished publisher of the Louisville* Courier Journal and Times. *They have four children, one of whom is Mark, Jr., editor of the Raleigh* (N.C.) Times. *In addition to being a wife and mother, running a house and garden, and accompanying her husband on various foreign missions for the government, Mrs. Ethridge has written seven books and many magazine and newspaper articles. She is also much in demand as a lecturer.*

UNIVERSAL LIBRARY
124 356
UNIVERSAL LIBRARY